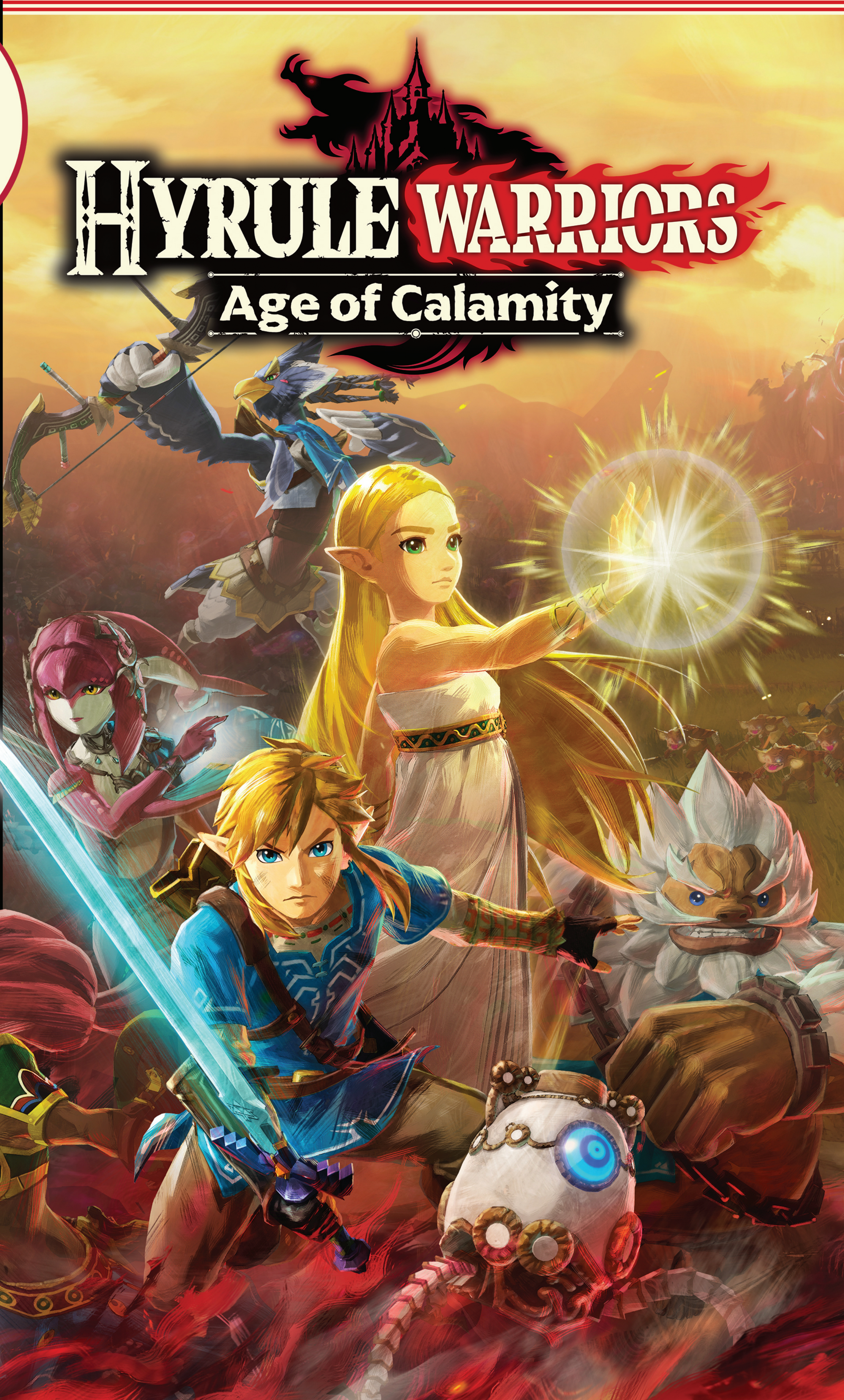
NF

ISSUE #49:
PEANUT BUTTER & CHOCOLATE

Hyrule Warriors
Age of Calamity



MARIO KART LIVE: HOME CIRCUIT

SUPER MARIO 3D ALL-STARS

SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD: THE GAME

INTERVIEW: SEAN CHIPLOCK

SAKUNA: OF RICE AND RUIN

PUYO PUYO TETRIS 2

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS OF COLD STEEL III

KINGDOM HEARTS: MELODY OF MEMORY

PIKMI
DE

GAM
SUPER M

BEA
BREA

SUPER M
BRO

THE P

DECEM

LINKS TO THE PAST

THE BACK CATALOG recovery project continues! Last time we had Mario on the cover, so we reactivated print edition sales for three past NF issues that also had Mario on the cover. Seems like that went over pretty well, so now let's do the same thing again – just with Link in the spotlight!

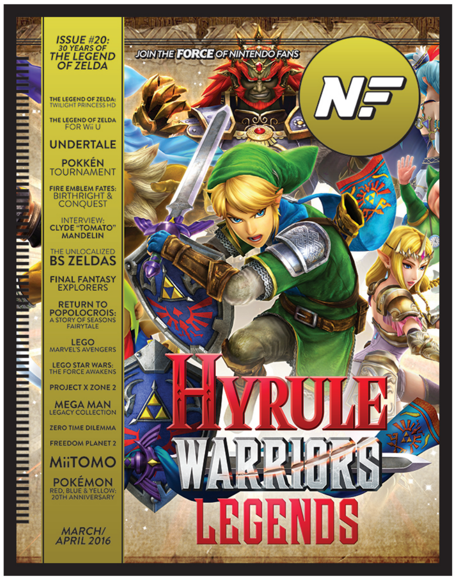
To complement this all-new NF edition with Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity on the cover, consider adding to your collection our first Hyrule Warriors cover: July/August 2014's NF Issue #10: When Worlds Collide. 2014 was a year when a whole lot of video game crossovers were happening. The previous issue, NF #9, had focused on Professor Layton vs. Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney. And then Hyrule Warriors came charging in, mashing up tons of past Zelda adventures into a single action-packed experience! We got ourselves good and hyped up within the pages of #10.

Then, exactly 10 issues later, we let the expanded 3DS re-release of Hyrule Warriors take the lead for NF #20! Since it was the biggest Zelda self-crossover ever, it worked well to represent the 30th anniversary of the series overall! That's what our focus was for that issue.

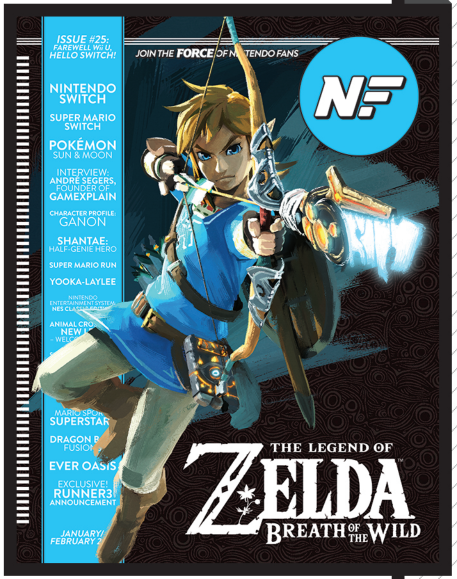
Finally, five issues after that, the masterpiece The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild ushered in our fifth year of publishing, as well as the Nintendo Switch era! It marked the transition between the Wii U generation and the all-new chapter that was just about to begin, and we spotlighted games that, like Breath of the Wild, we thought would likely end up having versions on both Wii U and Switch. It's fascinating to look back on those predictions now! **– LUCAS**

NFMagazine.com/Shop

ISSUE #10: WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE



ISSUE #20: 30 YEARS OF THE LEGEND OF ZELDA



ISSUE #25: FAREWELL Wii U, HELLO SWITCH!

We've made quite a bit of progress with this project! Even more coming soon, so stay tuned!

ISSUE #49:
PEANUT BUTTER & CHOCOLATE

CONTENTS

INBOX 4

NEWS 8

DOWNLOAD 14

COMICS 7, 27, 38, 50, 60, 81

FEATURES 28

PREVIEWS 39

RETRO 51

INTERVIEW 57

REVIEWS 61

COMMUNITY 78

NEXT ISSUE 82

NOVEMBER/
DECEMBER 2020

39

45

14

64

48

43

18

74

28

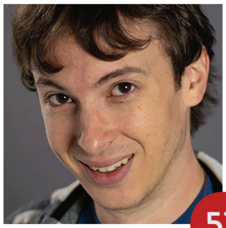
16

44

69

70

71


57

62

26

52

ON THE COVER

For the third time, the might of Musou has made its way to the cover of our magazine. Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity was likely originally meant to be a mid-year release before 2020 decided to slap the world out of its normal rhythm, but we can think of few better holiday season heavyweights than a canon continuation of the story of Breath of the Wild! We'll dive into the details in the pages ahead, and springboard off of its example to also explore a related topic of interest: video game genre mash-ups!

54

INBOX

TWO GREAT TASTES THAT TASTE GREAT TOGETHER

With nearly 50 different issues under our belts, we've had a few oddball theme names here and there – but I think "Peanut Butter & Chocolate" just might be our weirdest.

Then again, maybe not? Maybe you guessed at our intention from the start with the tasty memories that combination of confections calls to mind. The smooth (or crunchy!) nutty bliss of peanut butter . . . sometimes I'll just eat it by the spoonful. The rich decadence of chocolate – any dessert that includes it becomes an instant favorite of mine. Alone, each one is wonderful.

But together! When you blend the two into a single dish . . . it's culinary perfection. It's my favorite food combo on the planet, as the two together become an all-new thing that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Video games sometimes strive for that same mash-up magic. Not in the same way (please don't lick your Switch cartridges), but when some games are being designed, their creators intentionally set out to bring two great, separate gameplay concepts together into a single new experience. They smash disparate genres together to see what happens. Or they take two brands that previously established their own identities alone and have them cross over and clash in a new game that serves as a sequel to two separate series.

That's the gaming industry phenomenon that we're turning our attention to in this NF issue. Our titular central feature, Peanut Butter & Chocolate, looks back across some of the greatest genre mash-ups we've seen over the last few decades. We then highlight where two different game styles are coming together in one title all throughout the rest of the issue too – you'll see PB&C banners highlighting which genres are being combined in Download, Previews, Reviews and Retro too. And our cover game, Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity, happily and serendipitously falls under this same umbrella as well – it once again mashes up the Legend of Zelda franchise with the Dynasty Warriors brand, but more than that, its gameplay is more of a fusion than ever before. It's no mere Musou!

Finally . . . full disclosure . . . I *may* have been eating a little too much peanut butter & chocolate over the last several months to help myself deal with the stress of this year. (Please see the inevitable result of that behavior, my quest to begin exercising with Ring Fit Adventure, on Page 76.)

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #48: **SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2020**

The celebration of the 35th birthday of Super Mario Bros. began in our last issue and continues into this one, as in the pages ahead we play catch-up with some announcements we missed (since they became official only after our last print deadline!). Luckily, our predictions mostly turned out to be correct when we had to make a guess here and there!

Moving on to this issue, we wanted to get your input on third-party games in the latest Player's Poll. Which non-Nintendo publisher is your favorite, and why? What is a third-party series that has not yet appeared on the Switch, but should? And do you find yourself buying and playing many games released by companies other than Nintendo, or do you stick to first-party games first and foremost? As always, here's what many of you had to say in response:

LETTERS

In a fierce battle between Capcom, Level-5 and Square Enix, I eventually decided on Square Enix. I never truly noticed, but Square Enix made a lot of my favorite titles: The World Ends With You, Final Fantasy, Bravely Default, Dragon Quest and Kingdom Hearts, to name a few. I tend to choose their RPGs, but a lot of their other genres are great too.

I'd like Kingdom Hearts 3 to come to the Switch. My sister Ariel loves the series, and it's one of the few she's tried to (unsuccessfully) play. She would always beg me to play them for her whenever she came home from college. I had to keep a save file just for the Little Mermaid level, which was her favorite part. I bought every game in the series I could. (I even committed Nintendo sacrilege and bought a PS2 and PSP just for KH and my sister!) She was ecstatic to hear another KH was on the Switch . . . until she found out it was a spin-off. I'm not looking forward to buying another $200+ game system that will ultimately gather dust just to play KH3, but hey, that's what little brothers are for. **– BEN W.**

I got a Switch unexpectedly last Christmas and have found myself getting back into gaming proper – my last home console was a Wii. I think it's incredible that the Switch gets excellent third-party and indie support with titles ranging from Bethesda's Skyrim and Sega's Ages line of arcade titles to ConcernedApe's Stardew Valley and Aquiris' Horizon Chase Turbo. It was a challenge to decide who my third-party favorite was, but I had to go with Square Enix for their remasters and ports of classic Final Fantasy titles. **– BRYAN MITCHELL**

My favorite third-party publisher on Switch has gotta be . . . Limited Run Games! Sure, their publishing model is literally physically publishing cartridges, but I really love that they're enabling preservation of games that otherwise would vanish once the online store shutters. **– JASON HUNT**

I think it's awesome that we have so much third-party support on the Switch. I haven't seen this much support since the Super Nintendo days! I play a lot of third-party games on my Switch, such as Skyrim, Mega Man 11, all the Final Fantasy games, all the Dragon Quests, DOOM, Assassin's Creed, Rayman, Mario + Rabbids, Resident Evil, Octopath Traveler, Sega Genesis Collection, Mana Collection, Ys VIII: Lacrimosa of Dana, Bomberman, Ittle Dew 2, Telltale's Batman, LEGO games and Monopoly. The choices are almost endless! The Switch is definitely the best system, in my opinion, since the Super Nintendo! **– LEE NEIGHBORS**

I like plenty of third-party games, but I think I overall prefer first-party. **– DEL SYDEBOTHOM**

This feels like cheating, but my favorite third-party publisher on the Switch has to be Sega. From Sonic Mania to Bayonetta, from Puyo Puyo Tetris to Persona 5 Scramble: The Phantom

BANJO-KA-MAYBE?

Can I consider Microsoft a third party since they aren't Nintendo? And also consider a series that was previously published by Nintendo? I'd love to see Banjo-Kazooie back on a Nintendo console. **— KURT PRENGER**

I'm going to respond to this one with a firm "perhaps!" Microsoft and Nintendo have both been playing nicely together for years now, showing much more camaraderie and cooperation than either of the two shares with Sony. We've recently seen Banjo & Kazooie added to the Smash cast, and a second Microsoft-owned character, Minecraft Steve, is the newest addition to the Ultimate roster now (see Page 18). I don't think it's totally out of the realm of possibility that the bear & bird's older adventures could make a comeback on a Big N machine at some point. (As for a new sequel? That seems much less likely, even on Xbox hardware!)

Strikers, to even their upcoming remasters and sequels, it's hard to not be playing a Sega game on the Switch! **— LIAM WOOD**

My favorite third-party developer on the Switch is Motion Twin – they did an incredible job on Dead Cells and I would like to see more from them.

I would like to see more of the older Dragon Quest games make the jump to the Switch.

I usually play games from a lot of other developers, but I play a lot of Nintendo games also. **— JACK GREEN**

My favorite third-party publisher on the Switch so far has been Square Enix. The reason for this is because Final Fantasy VII, VIII, IX, X, X-2, XII and Dragon Quest XI are on the Switch, so I can play them whenever I am on the go. Also it has been a very long time since a main numbered Final Fantasy appeared on a Nintendo system. It would be nice if Square Enix released Final Fantasy XIII, XIII-2, XV and Lightning Returns on the Switch.

A third-party series that I would like to see on the Switch would be the Persona series – especially Persona 3, Persona 4 Golden and Persona 5 Royal. I am a huge fan of JRPGs, and I have no idea how the main numbered series has not been on a Nintendo system (not counting the Persona Q series). Over nine years ago, I first played Persona 3 on the PSP, and I hope the series gets a port/remaster/remake on the Switch, because playing that game changed my life for the better, and it would be nice if Nintendo players got the chance to enjoy this series on a Nintendo system.

I buy and play games based on whether they're good, not based on who has published it. Nintendo is still in my opinion the best first-party publisher, but if the Switch or any other Nintendo system does not have the game that I like on it, then I have no choice but to play that game on a non-Nintendo system. All I can do is hope there's a Nintendo version of that game! Unfortunately, I don't have the power to make the game playable on the Switch or any other Nintendo system, but it would be great if all of the games created could only be on the Switch or other Nintendo systems. **— GEORGE LEE**

DON'T ANGER THE OX

I'm gonna unnecessarily weigh in on the Galaxy 2 debacle.

Honestly, this was a no-win situation for Nintendo. Galaxy 2 is largely held as the superior Galaxy game, but with a bundle, what do you do? 64, Sunshine, and . . . Galaxy 2?

Or do you leave out 64, which I'm sure people would have problems with.

I know there's a case to be made for just including all four games, but I can understand Nintendo being reticent to make a jumbo release like that, along with the weirdness of two standalone games and Super Mario Galaxy 1+2.

— LINESPIDER5

Leaving aside the motion control aspect and ignoring that Nintendo themselves set the four-game standard with the collection's namesake, I *would* remove Super Mario 64. Why? Because it deserves better. Far better.

It should have its own release. With an Odyssey-style HD makeover of Super Mario 64 DS, but perhaps with even more stars to collect (DS added 30 for 150 total: 180 sounds pretty good to me).

Maybe another playable character – like Peach, once you rescue her (something Odyssey should have done, IMO).

And include an HD version of the original – what's in 3D All-Stars, basically – as a bonus.

And you don't release it for the 35th anniversary of Super Mario Bros. – you wait until next year, when it's the 25th anniversary of Super Mario 64 itself.

Because by golly, that's what a game as revolutionary as Super Mario 64 deserves! Not being shuffled out for another game's anniversary so scalpers can go bananas over a handful of physical copies before being thrown back into darkness for however long they decide to let it languish again. Ugh!

ERROR REPORT Wiiiiiiiiii!!!

Oh hey, here's some untrue trivia for you: The official name of Nintendo's old 2006 console with the motion-sensing Remote controllers is "the sound a gleeful kindergartener makes when cheerfully slipping down a playground slide." Because that's more of a noise than an actual word, the company had to make their best approximation of it in crude English letters and came up with "Wii!" They only used two lowercase I's in the marketing and on boxes and stuff to save printer ink, but technically any amount is also accurate. Wiiiii. Wiiii. Wiiiiiiiiiiiiii. It's all good. So when we printed "Wiii" on Page 53 in our last issue, it really wasn't an error at all! OK?

LETTERS, CONTINUED!

I would really like to have the Portal series on the Switch. **– BENJAMIN HILTY**

My favorite third-party publisher on Switch is hard to pick, but ultimately I'd have to go with Capcom. Too many of my favorite series are thanks to them! Mega Man, Phoenix Wright, Street Fighter and Resident Evil, the list goes on and on!

I simply NEED to see a Metal Gear Solid collection on the Switch! All of my favorite games have made it to Nintendo's hybrid console except this one holdout: Snake! Snake??? SNAAAAAAAAKE!!!!!

I typically buy a mix of games. There are some first-party series I make sure I always buy, and then I often pick whatever third-party games grab my interest at the time. It's always fun discovering a new franchise and a new adventure! **– TOM M. (GAMETOM)**

I would love to see the Dark Cloud series on the Switch.

I always get the first-party titles, you know, because Nintendo, but I buy third-party stuff too because playing on the go is the best! Sometimes that makes a difference when choosing what console to get a game on. **– MARTIN SCHMITZ**

I've always enjoyed buying Sega games on Nintendo platforms because of their legacy being nearly as grand. It just felt like the correct transition when they stopped producing consoles.

The core Kingdom Hearts franchise needs to come to Switch. They've already had so many sub-games on Nintendo platforms, it's time to bring the whole thing home!

While first-party titles are preferred, I seem to exclusively only buy games for Switch now as my other systems collect dust. Switch will always be the best choice for multiplatform games because of Gold Coins! **– JOHN KNUDSEN**

Well, my favorite third-party publisher on the Switch has to be Square Enix. While it's a shame that the Final Fantasy 7 remake probably won't get a Switch release, the company still makes an effort to put many high-quality games on the Switch, as well as some of their classics.

However, I do feel that Sega should be bringing another third-party series to the Switch, with that being Shenmue. Re-releasing the first two games on the Switch would make a lot of money. (Also my Dreamcast would not allow me to play through the whole game.)

Lastly, because I have many classic game consoles near my TV, most of my Switch games are made by Nintendo. **– MATTHEW JENKIN**

Right away I thought of Limited Run Games – how their games are just so fresh and unique. But I'm not sure that they're a publisher. Maybe more like a distributor? Since I'm unsure about that, I'll go with Atlus. There's just something about their style that I enjoy.

I don't just stick to first-party games. Two of the first games I bought were Super Mario Odyssey and The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. But I recently played Undertale (which I really enjoyed) and am in middle of A Hat In Time. First-party games are great, but why stop there? Why limit yourself on what might be a fun experience? **– B.Z.**

My favorite third-party publisher for the Nintendo Switch is Square Enix. I have two physical releases of theirs: Dragon Quest XI S and Collection of Mana. Between the demo and the full release of the former, I've put over 165 hours into it, second only to Zelda: Breath of the Wild on that console. I've been looking forward to playing Seiken Densetsu 3 since I first read about it in Gamefan Magazine back the mid-'90s. I'm waiting until I finish DQ XI and Breath of the Wild, as I prefer to finish games and not have too many long ones in progress simultaneously. I''m a fan of adventure and role-playing games, and Square Enix is one of the key publishers.

Hideo Kojima's Snatcher and its spiritual successor Policenauts are two games I'd love to see on the Switch. These are graphic adventures with engaging plots with plenty of twists and turns. Kojima's been gone from Konami for five years, so I suspect the chances of this happening are very low. But the Japanese version of Snatcher was in the TG16 Mini, so maybe there's a slight chance? **– MATTHEW SWENSON**

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Jack Green**, the winner of our third-party Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to some questions about Nintendo Force Magazine!

QUESTION(S) #1

How long have you been an NF reader? How did you first hear about this magazine? What has been your favorite issue so far, and why?

QUESTION #2

As we move on to our 50th issue and beyond, what's one thing we could add to our issues that you'd love to see?

QUESTION #3

Over the last eight years, what has been NF's biggest miss for a cover? What game should've been given a cover position, but got wrongfully denied?

Email your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #50" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win a year-long NF subscription for five different friends! (They'll love you!)

NINTENDO FORCE

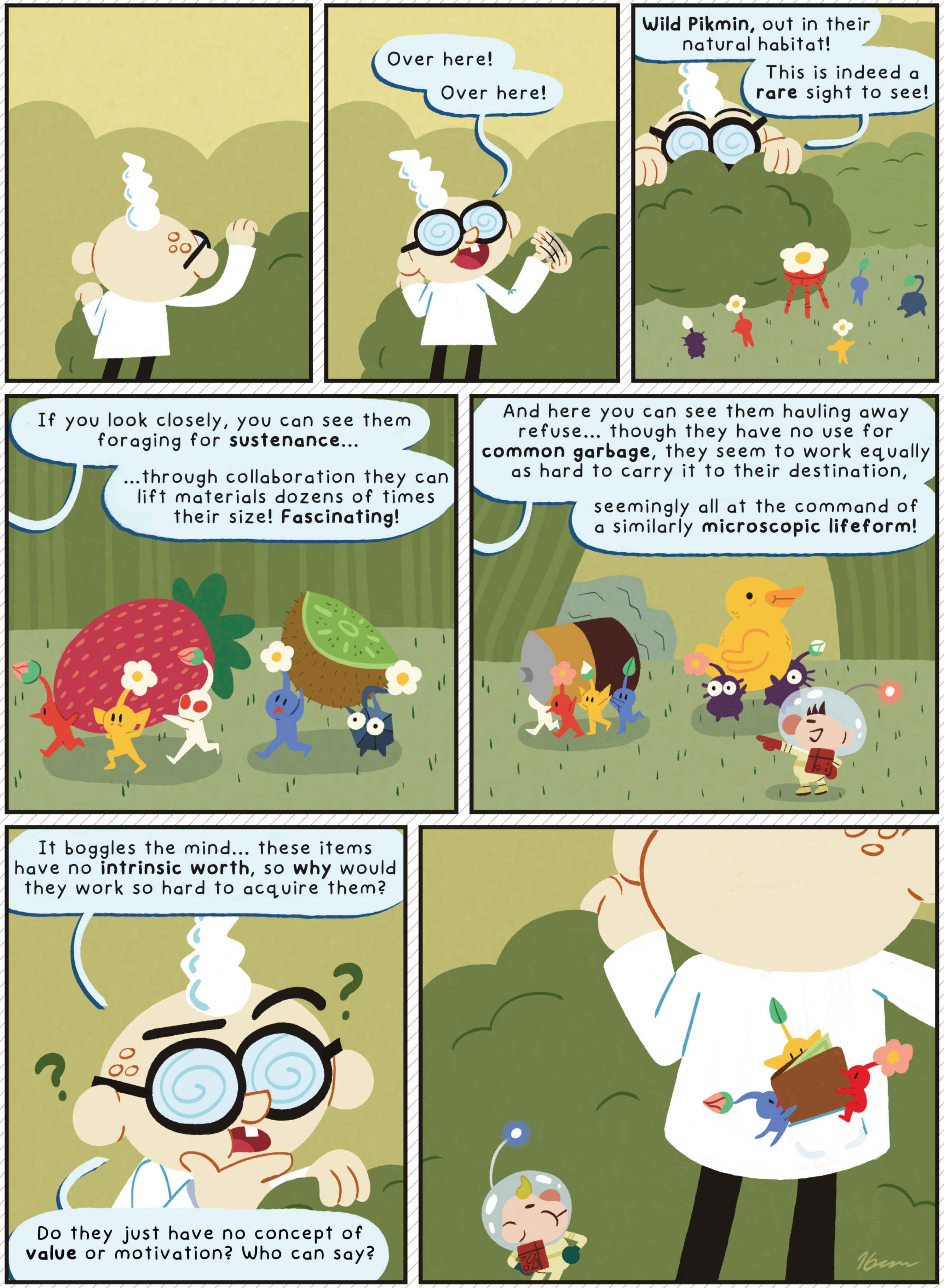
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Lucas M. Thomas
@NintendoForce

STAFF WRITERS
Evan Campbell
@evancampbell
Chris Carter
@DtoidChris
Kevin Cassidy
@GoNintendoTweet
Jonathan Holmes
@NonTrotski
Kevin Knezevic
@kevknez
Brett Martin
@NightramVGMM
David Oxford
@LBD_Nytetrayn
Nadia Oxford
@nadiaoxford
Tony Ponce
@megaStryke
Kris Randazzo
@GeekadeKris
Rebecca Rudranath
@strawbecky_81

STAFF ARTISTS
Lindsey Layne King
@Jazaaboo
Matthew Loffhagen
@kotorcomics
Matthew Taranto
@MatthewPTaranto
Thor Thorvaldson
@thormeister1971

CONTRIBUTORS
John-Charles Holmes
@Sonic9jct
Maggie Jones Lutey
@AvengerMags

GET IN TOUCH!
Have a question? The best way to ask it is through Patreon's Direct Messaging system, which you have access to if you're one of our Patreon patrons!



BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

THE NEXT GENERATION BEGINS

. . . Nintendo's just not ready to take part in it quite yet.

BACK IN 2001, Nintendo's brand-new GameCube went on sale just three days after Microsoft had rolled out the first-ever Xbox. Five years after that, the PlayStation 3 and the Wii both hit the market in the same November week – just *two* days apart. Now, history's repeating itself once again. But this time, Nintendo isn't taking part!

The next generation of home video game consoles is just about to begin, as Sony is debuting the PlayStation 5 and Microsoft is launching the Xbox Series X. Microsoft will strike first, as their shiny new box will hit store shelves on November 10. The PS5 will then follow it 48 hours later, making its official debut on November 12.

Why do these major new console releases always seem to happen on top of one another? Even in the gen before, the PS4 and the Xbox One hit just one week apart. You'd think it would be wiser to try to space things out a bit more and avoid going head-to-head against the competition so directly, right?

Well, Sony and Microsoft seem not to think so, but Nintendo sure enough has adopted that kind of thinking. The Wii launch was the last time the Big N tried to face off against an industry rival so directly. And though Nintendo won that war (the Wii was wildly popular and ended up selling over 20,000,000 more units than the PS3 by the time that gen came to an end), the company has since set sail for the calmer waters of the "blue ocean" and never looked back.

. . . But Nintendo's console design team may be diving into this new battle soon. In their own way – it's unlikely that the next Big N machine will be positioned as a direct competitor to the new Sony and Microsoft boxes seen above, but timing-wise, we might not have to wait too much longer to see it.

Yes, the "Switch Pro" rumors have been making the rounds once again, and I for one think an unveiling is likely imminent. The Nintendo Switch is closing in on four years old. The one revision it has received, the Switch Lite, is over a year old itself now. I think we're probably due for a look at the next iteration of the Switch, and if I were to guess at a timetable, I'd say that a full reveal in January and then a launch in March would be what will happen.

Why March? Well, the first Switch went on sale in March 2017. The first 3DS was rolled out in March 2011. And some recent release date reveals seem to be telling, too: Both Square Enix's Balan Wonderworld and Capcom's just-revealed Monster Hunter Rise recently got the same confirmed release date of March 26, 2021. Now why would two different major third-party releases settle on the exact same launch day, over half a year in advance? There's got to be something else happening on March 26 to draw them to that date like a magnet. Switch Pro?

It's all still speculation for now, but in the meanwhile we can take a look at what the competition is up to, just for a couple of points of comparison.

Microsoft's not just selling the new Series X on November 10, but also the less powerful, less expensive Series S as a more entry-level proposition. The black box has all the bells and whistles for $499, while the white one makes some cuts – like the disc drive – to arrive at a $299 price tag. But really, Microsoft's big push in this new generation is their Game Pass service, which is seeking to become a true "Netflix of video games."

Meanwhile, Sony's offering two PS5 models too, one of which is also all-digital with no disc drive. It's $399 for that one, or $499 for the one that will still take physical media. I know which one Limited Run Games will prefer!

> I have a bit of a history of buying expensive new electronic toys when I'm feeling down, and after this bummer of a year I've had to hold myself back from splurging on one of these fancy new Xbox or PlayStation machines just to get that fleeting endorphin rush from unboxing them and setting them up for the first time. I'm going to hold out, though, and hope for the Switch Pro to be revealed as real, real soon! – **LUCAS**

THE LAST GENERATION ENDS

Nintendo's now fully focused on the Switch, as the 3DS line has been discontinued.

IN SEPTEMBER 2020, Nintendo announced some sad news to fans of handheld gaming the world over: The Nintendo 3DS has ceased production.

If you were to ask fans, however, the end of the Nintendo 3DS' lifespan came well before this news arrived. Not only had the 2017 release of the Nintendo Switch bridged the gap between console and handheld with its hybrid design, but the more recent Nintendo Switch Lite is a dedicated piece of Portable Power hardware, effectively eclipsing the 3DS' place in the market.

But the final nail in the coffin for many fans was in the games – or rather, the lack thereof, specifically from Nintendo themselves. The last first-party title to be released for the platform (in North America, at least) was Kirby's Extra Epic Yarn, a port of the Wii Kirby title. And aside from co-releases of Level-5's Yo-kai Watch titles, that largely encapsulates the story of Nintendo's 3DS support toward the end of its run: ports and remakes of previously seen titles, such as Luigi's Mansion, Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker and a pair of Mario & Luigi RPGs.

With that said, rough times for the 3DS were nothing new to supporters of the system. In fact, things were so rocky for the 3DS that only a mere four months after its launch in March 2011, it received a cut of a third of its original price of $249.99 to entice potential buyers. With a new price tag of $169.99, Nintendo also tried to make good to those who'd supported them in the early going by introducing the Nintendo 3DS Ambassador Program, which gave early adopters a special certificate on their menu and 20 free downloadable games: 10 NES titles that would later be upgradeable to their full Virtual Console versions, and 10 less fully-featured Game Boy Advance titles that would never see a widespread release on the platform.

Less than a year later, Nintendo revealed that the Nintendo 3DS would follow in the footsteps of its predecessor by getting an upsized upgrade, the Nintendo 3DS XL. Little was different about this model, save for its larger size, which included screens that were 90 percent larger than the original model.

One of the more controversial elements of the Nintendo 3DS was its key feature: the ability to generate fully 3D visuals without a need for special glasses. However, for various reasons, not everyone could – or did – enjoy this functionality, including those who worried about the development of younger children's eyes. To address that, Nintendo released the not-at-all-confusingly-named Nintendo 2DS in October 2013. Marketed as a more kid-friendly version of the increasingly popular portable, this wedge-shaped, single-piece iteration arrived alongside Pokémon X & Y.

Nintendo followed that with two more versions: the New Nintendo 3DS and New Nintendo 3DS XL. Mirroring their non-New namesakes in size, they packed slightly beefier hardware that allowed for certain more resource-intensive games to run better, as well as SNES Virtual Console games. They also added a new "camera nub" input that could be used in certain games.

Finally, there came the New Nintendo 2DS XL, which for some was the ultimate version of the hardware: no 3D to contend with, but featuring a clamshell design like the rest of the 3DS family.

As rocky as things were for the 3DS to start, almost every fan would agree that the company was able to redirect its trajectory successfully in that first year – and that set us up for nearly a decade of great gaming since. Now, the whole 3DS line has earned a place of honor in gaming history. **– DAVID**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

EXE Anniversary

The celebration of Battle Network's 20th birthday has begun.

ORIGINALLY UNVEILED AT the MegaHobby Expo in Japan in November 2019, this stunning statue features the rivals MegaMan.EXE and Bass.EXE locked in an epic battle. Also featured is Bass.EXE's Viral canine companion Gospel (or rather the husk of the defeated pup). The statue is made by MegaHouse, and the finished piece will stand close to eight inches. They're calling it a Game Character Collection DX figure, and MegaMan can be displayed with a removable battle mask piece. We had only seen it in its grayscale prototype form for so long – it's nice to see just how vibrant the colors are with their metallic sheen!

This statue is now confirmed for a U.S. release, which is always something to worry about when items are produced in Japan. February 24, 2021 is the release date, pushed back from December. The pandemic is obviously the culprit for the delay, with fans at one point wondering if it was scrapped. Pre-orders for the Japanese version have opened, and they're around $145. Most U.S. shops are placing it between $170 and $180. Everything about the piece says quality. Now we just have to see if the materials and paint job hold up to the stellar photos!

Pin Missions

Were you lucky enough to claim these collectibles?

WHAT. A. DEBACLE.

Nintendo, upon announcing Super Mario 3D All-Stars, opened a 35th anniversary website with a "Missions" section. If various missions were accomplished, then fans could earn a reward: a pin set featuring classic-style Mario art of all the mainline Mario games. The pin codes went up the morning of September 21 – before the Mario Kart Tour event "mission" was over – and that event said it could take until September 29 to register! People also had to purchase and register 3D All-Stars, so if you didn't go digital or had a shipping problem, you may have been out of luck. Other missions included web-based stuff like a quiz and music player. Many people missed out due to the botched release, and naturally they were highly limited, leaving many fans disappointed. Alas.

Only five of the 10 total pins were part of "Wave 1," though, so a "Wave 2" should be coming in the near future for the rest. Be ready!

Hyrule Snugglers

Winning the battle of bedtime!

PREVIOUSLY THE ONLY plushes released for The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild were Link in his Champion's Tunic and a Bokoblin. It still blows my mind that the Bokoblin was the first Zelda enemy to be released in plush form beyond Ganondorf! (Has there really never been a stuffed Octorok?)

Now, the line is finally expanding. Recently, San-ei Boeki announced that they would be releasing Breath of the Wild's version of Princess Zelda in her traveling clothes. This is odd, as Zelda and Link would have made a better pair to start with, but I'll take it either way!

The plush – which is Japan-only as of this printing – will be around $20 and will release this November. Many items have been bumped due to the pandemic, and San-ei normally releases toward the end of the year for the holidays. The Bokoblin and Link were eventually released in North America through Little Buddy, the distributing partner of San-ei. So, some patience may behoove those wanting to own a plush Zelda with a little plush pouch. (Presumably for holding little plush Silent Princess flowers.)

Me? I'm importing, because I don't wait well.

If you missed out on Link, he is also re-releasing alongside Zelda, so you'll have a chance to own the pair. Meanwhile, as of this writing, the Bokoblin is available to order over at store.nintendo.com. It might not last long, though!

Collector's Corner is compiled by Brett Martin, the world record holder for the largest collection of video game memorabilia on Earth. For more cool collectibles and information on how to order from import shops, visit his site, The Video Game Memorabilia Museum, at videogamemm.com.

Pac-Monopoly Powers On

The 40-year-old video game meets the 85-year-old board game.

JUST ANOTHER MONOPOLY reskin, right? Wrong! This version of Monopoly has players using the enclosed mini arcade cabinet to be a banker, pay rent, buy property and play Pac-Man! The properties are replaced with levels, with levels 15 and 16 representing Park Place and Boardwalk. Different colored Pac-Mans (Pac-Men?) replace the tokens, but there is also a ghost piece that chases or is chased by the pack of Pacs. A special Ghost Die, when rolled, determines where the ghost goes. If it gets you, then it's off to jail! Chance cards are replaced by Power Pellets and power-ups like cherries. These help you gobble the ghost and get an advantage over opponents. When you pass Go, hit up the arcade and play your purchased levels, or sell them to (or steal them from) your opponents. A token activates the game, and a tiny Pac-Man eats his way through your purchased levels, increasing your score. The player with the highest score wins! This eliminates the need for paper money, as it's all stored in the arcade, making it easier to play with kids. Levels also look to change hands pretty regularly because of the power-ups, so neither aspect of the game should get stale . . . aside from maybe the minutes spent watching others playing Pac-Man on a tiny screen. This innovative take on the classic retails for $30.

amiibo UPDATE

IT'S BEEN A while since we could provide you a worthwhile update for amiibo, but now we have several new amiibo to talk about!

First off, as promised, the Joker and Hero amiibo were released to the masses and there was much rejoicing, signaling the beginning of DLC character amiibo. There was significant stock in most places too (even though Amazon's inflated reseller price seemed to indicate otherwise).

Next, we saw two amiibo announced during the Super Mario 35th Anniversary Nintendo Direct. Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury was featured, and shortly after the Direct ended, additional press materials revealed a Cat Mario and Cat Peach amiibo. The art for the game had Mario and Peach looking very fuzzy like cats, but the amiibos are . . . bumpy. They're trying to mimic the look of a fuzzy suit in a hard plastic medium. It has interesting results, and fans had some fun with it on Twitter for a time, but it was generally accepted well. There were no details discussed about what the figures might actually do in-game when scanned, but I'd hazard a guess that they'll reveal a Super Bell to instantly unlock feline form.

A line of three new Monster Hunter amiibo was also announced for the newly revealed Monster Hunter Rise game coming out March 26. A Palico felyne as well as the new canine breed called a Palamute were shown for the "buddy" amiibos. A Magnamalo monster amiibo was also revealed, and it will be available in the collector's edition of the game, as well as sold separately. All three amiibo unlock special layered armor and give players access to a daily lottery that can yield vital items for the hunt.

In re-release news, you'll have a second chance to nab the four Champions from Breath of the Wild! Mipha, Urbosa, Daruk and Revali will be packaged separately and available for purchase on November 20. Presumably they'll do something in Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity. Maybe unlocking new weapons for each hero?

Finally (for now), Mr. Sakurai gave us our first look at the Banjo & Kazooie, Terry and Byleth amiibo figures at the end of his Steve showcase video on October 3. Each one looks great, but sadly only the male Byleth is planned to be made into a figure. Sorry, fans of female Byleth!

※イメージです
© Nintendo TM & © Universal Studios. All rights reserved.

※イメージです
© Nintendo TM & © Universal Studios. All rights reserved.

Super Nintendo World's Wares

Take an early look at what we'll be able to buy . . . eventually!

SOMEWHERE OUT IN the multiverse, there's an alternate timeline in which the COVID-19 pandemic never took place. In that other reality, I'm sure Nintendo fans the world over have been enjoying Nintendo's first theme park immensely since its on-time opening a few months ago.

As for us? Well, we've got a little bit longer to wait.

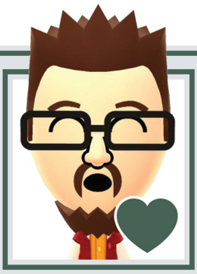
Nintendo and Universal Studios Japan have recently announced that Super Nintendo World is now set to open to visitors in Spring 2021. It was originally supposed to open alongside the 2020 Summer Olympics in Japan earlier this year, but that never happened, of course. For safety, it just couldn't.

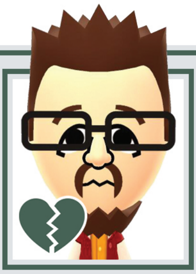
But as we look forward to a future when it will eventually be safe to travel again, we're being offered an advanced glimpse at a few items that will be on sale as part of the Super Nintendo World attendee experience. You can start saving your coins now and look forward to buying drinks with mustache straws, Super Mushroom sippers and fruit-packed snacks in the shape of Mario and Luigi's hats.

Or should I say "caps?" Apparently the question "Whose cap?" has been selected to be a recurring phrase across lots of Super Nintendo World merch, including shirts, pencil cases and pillows. A pillow might seem like an odd souvenir, but it could be useful on the long flight home from Japan!

Some of these items are already on sale in a Mario-themed store that is now open in a different section of the Universal Studios Japan park, so keep an eye on eBay if you're too eager to wait for your own trip! **— LUCAS**

Great!
Super Nintendo World has a new plan for opening!





Oh.
Seeing goodies like these just makes the wait harder.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

KICKING OFF THE month of November will be, well, the final release of October! Just like last year with Luigi's Mansion 3, Nintendo is sending a new release out the door just before the calendar flips into the year's penultimate month. Pikmin 3 Deluxe goes on sale on October 30, and we've got the first half of a two-part review for you in this issue. Flip all the way to Page 64 to get started!

ONE OF THE most prominent peanut butter & chocolate mash-ups in recent memory, the long-awaited Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin will finally be available to play beginning November 10. We've got one final preview for you on Page 48, and then please look forward to reading our full review in our next edition!

THEN, JUST THREE days later, another fresh smooshing-together of two great things will arrive: Melody of Memory is Kingdom Hearts meets Theatrhythm! It's also a fusion of the rhythm and action genres . . . *and* Kingdom Hearts was already defined as a series built on crossovers between Disney brands and Square Enix drama! That's all quite a lot for one package! Grab it November 13, and read more on Page 49.

NOVEMBER KEEPS SERVING up the hits! After Sakuna and Sora have had their chance to visit your Switch, Link, Zelda and the rest of the gang from the world of Breath of the Wild will return in Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity! November 20 will be its debut date, and you can read our cover story preview beginning on Page 39.

SEGA MANAGED TO make some new magic when they first combined the two old "falling block" puzzle designs of Puyo Puyo and Tetris three years ago, and beginning on December 8 you'll be able to experience their sophomore effort as that one-off spin-off receives a sequel and establishes an ongoing series! Page 43 holds our final preview for this one, and then we'll have our review in NF #50.

FINALLY, A QUICK look ahead into the New Year. (Won't it be so nice to finally bid a not-so-fond farewell to the abysmal 2020?) The rumored "Super Mario 3D World Deluxe" will arrive on February 12, 2021 – but it's going to be given an extra chunk of content entitled "Bowser's Fury." We've got a brief look on Page 44. Then much more next time!

"Things were looking dicey for a while, and development and production delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have definitely bumped several titles out of this holiday season and into 2021, but even still the end of 2020 has ended up looking pretty good (from a Switch software standpoint). We should have plenty of new games to play to weather the winter months ahead, and then a more robust New Year than we would've had! **– LUCAS**"

The Crown Tundra

THE CROWN TUNDRA is now open for exploration! Or rather, it will be by the time the print copies of this issue arrive in our subscribers' mailboxes. October 22 is when the second half of the Pokémon Sword & Shield Expansion Pass goes live around the world.

. . . Which means we must ask for your patience, NF faithful! That date is just a bit past our deadline for finalizing the content for this edition, so we'll have to run our review in our next issue instead. We'll be hard at work on it by the time you're reading this, though!

In the meanwhile, please accept the following introduction to another new Pokémon: It's Galarian Slowking! Just like Galarian Slowbro on the Isle of Armor, this new Slowking is Poison/Psychic. But it's got an all-new ability and a unique move all its own! The ability Curious Medicine resets all ally Pokémon's stat stages to 0 when Galarian Slowking enters the battle (thanks, doc!) and the new move Eerie Spell is a Psychic-type Special attack that both does damage and make the opposing 'mon lose 3 PP from the last move it used. In the hands of a true Pokémon Master, this sinister Slowking will surely be a force to be reckoned with!

Saved from Digital Oblivion

Six years after being delisted, Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game is finally coming back!

MUCH HAS CHANGED in the world of gaming with the shift to digital, especially where video game preservation is concerned. When a game receives no physical release, its longevity is tied almost exclusively to those who were able to purchase its original version from its original digital storefront and keep it stored in the memory of an original system — as further releases may never come.

While titles wholly owned by the publisher can remain in online storefronts in perpetuity, sometimes they wind up removed anyway. Familiar examples include Konami's P.T., the Donkey Kong Country trilogy on the Wii Virtual Console, Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze on the Wii U eShop and, until just very recently, Pikmin 3, also in the Wii U eShop. (It got re-added after the backlash to its removal, which we covered last time.) Of course, that's not even taking into account Nintendo just shutting whole services down entirely, as they did with the Wii Shop Channel.

This is especially true of licensed games. These games, usually based on intellectual property from other mediums, tend to tread much shakier ground, for as soon as the contract with the IP holder expires . . . poof, that's it. No more game. What's more, this removal can come with little or no notice at all (as with the above examples), and has even happened when a game has only been available for less than a year.

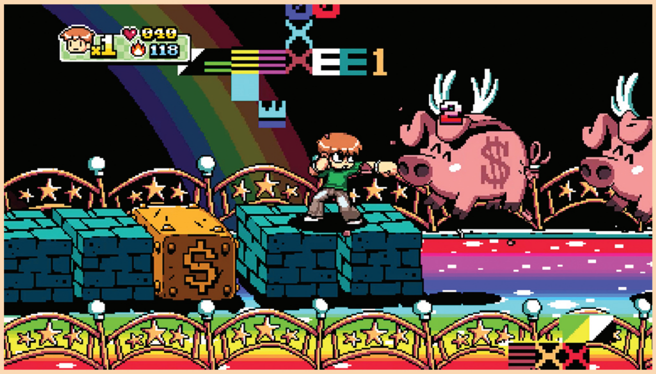
A lot of licensed titles don't tend to be held in very high regard, but there are some gems and cult classics out there that nevertheless get removed from digital sale, leaving fans and those who have only been so fortunate as to hear about them to bemoan the current state of things. Sure, you might get to start playing your preloaded title in your comfy robe and slippers as soon as the clock strikes midnight (as someone who braved a literal snowstorm to get Super Smash Bros. Brawl at its midnight launch, I can certainly appreciate that), but at what cost in the longer term?

However, there are the rare occasions when such a game comes back from the digital aether. For Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game, after six long years, the fates have decreed "not yet."

All told, compared to titles from Marvel and other licensed fare, Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game had a pretty decent lifespan in the digital market. It was released by Ubisoft on Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network and remained on sale for a good four years or so following its August 2010 debut. But then, for reasons unknown, it was pulled in December of 2014. Merry Christmas, I guess.

The long-running speculation is that despite being based more on the original comic book, the video game's license was granted by Universal Pictures, who distributed the motion picture that the game was timed to coincide with. As a result, despite the passion and desire shown by everyone from Scott Pilgrim fans to the comic's creator, Bryan Lee O'Malley himself, it seemed there was no way for the game to return without Universal having the final say.

Then came the Ubisoft Forward event of September 2020, where it was revealed that not only was Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game being pulled out of digital purgatory, but it would be released on every available



modern platform (sans mobile), including the Nintendo Switch, as "Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game – Complete Edition," and would even include the downloadable content that had also been removed from digital storefronts, allowing players to take control of the characters of Knives Chau and Wallace Wells, and also play in two additional game modes: Battle Royal and Dodge Ball.

Lending credence to the speculation behind the game's lack of reissue being attributed to Universal was an email sent to Kotaku from O'Malley himself, explaining that Ubisoft had apparently been working toward this for a while, but there had been a communication breakdown due to someone at Universal not doing their job and reaching out to let him know.

For his part, as well as those of the rest of the creative staff of the game (many of whom have since founded Tribute Games), they didn't have a hand in this version of the game, and so won't be seeing a dime from this re-release . . . and didn't from the original release, for that matter! Presumably, that all goes to Universal as part of their licensing agreement (O'Malley couldn't be reached for comment to clarify). As it stands, he simply considers himself "a figurehead for the fans," but hopes that "maybe if I'm good they'll give me some download codes."

In addition, O'Malley provides some hope for the future of the game, stating that he thinks the game will see a physical release "of some sort" this time around, but adds that "deals are still being finalized."

But what, you may be wondering, is all the hullabaloo about? Well, aside from being a tie-in to the aforementioned cult classic Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World graphic novel series and its subsequent movie adaptation, The Game provided a fresh yet retro-styled beat-'em-up experience in a time when the well was running pretty dry of such titles. Not only that, but its four-player cooperative adventure also took some cues from another classic retro brawler, River City Ransom, as each character had their own movesets that could be upgraded through the power of experience.

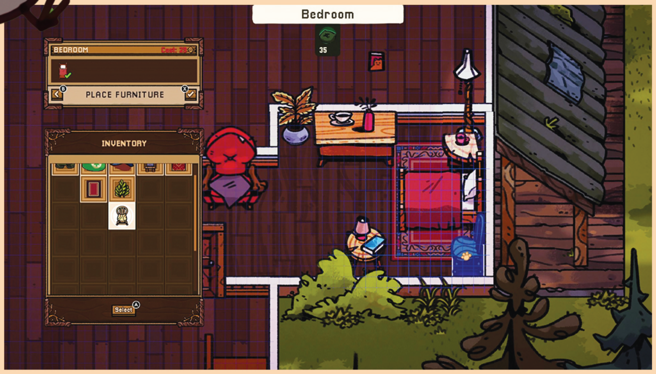
The story follows one Scott Pilgrim, a geeky, skinny bass player in a local rock band, who has fallen madly in love with the mysterious Ramona Flowers. But unfortunately for him, before the two can be together, there's the little matter of her seven evil exes who must be dealt with across the game's seven stages in order for the two to have a happily ever after. (On the upside, Ramona isn't a helpless damsel here, as she's one of the four initially playable characters to choose from.)

Making the graphic novel-styled graphics more novel is the work of renowned pixel artist Paul Robertson (Drawn to Life, Shantae: Risky's Revenge, Shantae and the Pirate's Curse), who served as lead animator for The Game and saw to it that things are always moving. Further adding to the retro-styled video game feel that so fits the Scott Pilgrim universe is the chiptune band Anamanaguchi, who provided the music heard throughout.

Unfortunately, there's been something of a dark cloud looming over this bright news, as there has been much ado about the company releasing it leading up to their announcement. Without getting into the nitty-gritty, there have been things happening that might give fans reservations about handing over any of their hard-earned coin to the folks in charge – something which is only compounded by the aforementioned fact of no one in the trenches actually involved in bringing the game to life actually receiving any of that money. In fact, some even suspect that they might be trying to use this release to curry favor (though if this has really been in the works for as long a while as O'Malley says, that might be more a matter of convenient happenstance than any sort of Machiavellian plot).

This personally tears at me. The biggest issue is that, for various reasons, I missed out the first time and have been filled with regret in the six years ever since. This is a game that effectively hits many of the right notes for me: Beat-'em-up fan? Check. Retro fan? Check. Scott Pilgrim fan? Check. Takes place in my home of Toronto, which I've spent more time in than any other place in my life and has an astoundingly small presence as a setting in video games (I've even been using screenshots of the Mario-esque map screen as a desktop wallpaper for some time now)? Check and mate.

Of course, had there been a physical release, this wouldn't be an issue. Well, less of an issue – it would still be tied to hardware two generations old as of this November, but nevertheless. Hopefully that is something that will be rectified this time around, so that future generations might not have to deal with this quandary. Thankfully, even if Ubisoft themselves don't do something, companies like Limited Run Games have not only helped sate such demands, but even re-released some games based on licensed properties such as Star Wars, showing they're more than up to the task! **– DAVID**



Ursine Inn

Say hello to Hank in **Bear and Breakfast.**

DOES A BEAR decorate in the woods?

During last August's Indie World Showcase, an unusual yet endearing title was revealed to be coming soon to the Nintendo Switch: Bear and Breakfast. And as you can probably tell from the name, this "laid-back" management and adventure game is all about a bed & breakfast that's run by a bear.

You play as the well-meaning teenage bear Hank, who, along with his friends, discovers an abandoned shack in the woods. Like any aspiring entrepreneurs, they recognize a good money-making opportunity when they see one, and so they decide to turn the place around, building the ideal tourist trap with their own bear hands.

Except, since bears don't have hands, it's up to you to lend them one of yours! You'll want to fully customize the various pieces of furniture and fixtures of the numerous guest rooms, parlors, bathrooms and even entertainment to a high standard of koala-ty, so your visitors will have a grand old time over the course of their stay. The bear necessities won't do here, as you'll want to make them happy by panda-ing to their every need. Succeed, and they'll make you happy by increasing your reputation, which brings in even more customers. Oh, and they'll even tip you, too!

On the other hand, if they aren't satisfied, they may just leave you a grizzly review.

There's more going on here than just a management sim with a twist, however. Rather than doing the bear minimum, you'll want to complete objectives and carry out storylines which not only progress the plot, but also get you more stuff for your B&B.

It's not just the inn you'll be minding – you'll be checking out the woods as well. And when you see what's out there, it might take a moment for you to regain your bearings!

Along the way, you'll meet other strange folk, pursue sidequests and discover secrets. Just be careful – while some of the people you'll come across will be happy to lend advice so your business venture can reach new heights, there are others who'd be just as happy to see it all burn to the ground. How unbearable!

Some of the strange characters you'll meet are Diana the Shiba-Inu and Jax the Mastiff, who seem to indicate that maybe the "people" you'll be tending to are of the more furry variety. To that same end, there is Took, a trash-pilfering bandit of a raccoon, and a mysterious, scary fox (named, fittingly enough, "Scary Fox") with burning eyes in the woods who looks like something straight out of Capcom's Okami – so it may take all types. Either way, they seem like beary interesting folks who you'll want to get to know. We can bearly wait!
– DAVID

Tag Along with the Losers

Help a class of superpowered kids defy fate in Kotaro Uchikoshi's next adventure, World's End Club.

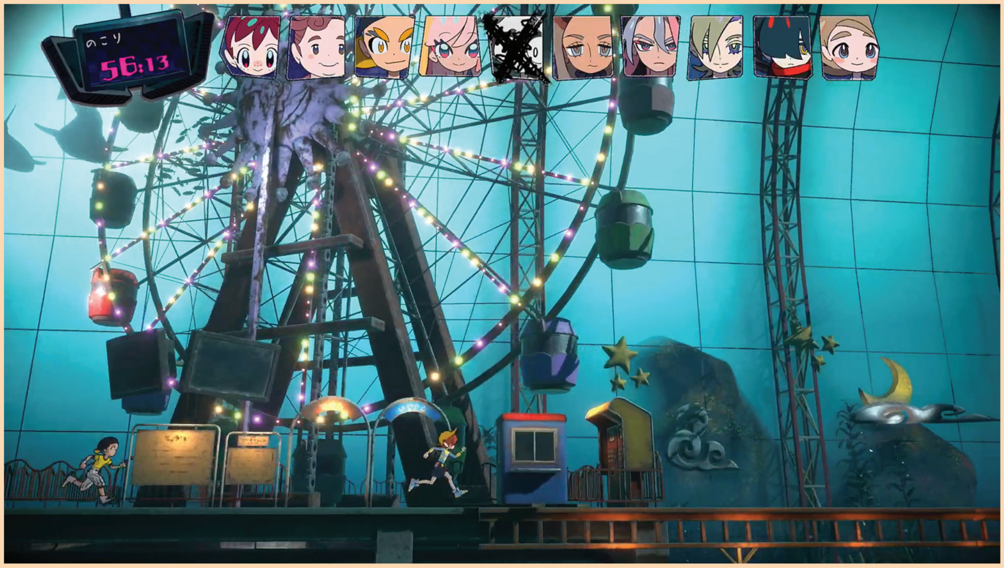
I'VE MADE NO secret of my love for the works of Kotaro Uchikoshi, whose Zero Escape series – and, most recently, AI: The Somnium Files – had me drenched in anxious sweat. But when NF boss man Lucas asked if I'd like to pen the preview for Uchikoshi's latest game, my immediate response was "Who did what now?" How have I been completely unaware of the next potential masterpiece by my visual novel idol!? Was I in a coma!? *What year is it!?*

After a cold shower, I dug up everything I could find concerning World's End Club. Turns out it's not solely an Uchikoshi production – he shares directing duties alongside Takumi Nakazawa, with whom he collaborated on the mostly Japan-exclusive Infinity visual novels, and Kazutaka Kodaka, writer of the cult classic Danganronpa series. With these three maestros of suspense at the helm, the expectation for grand thrills and shocking twists couldn't be higher!

Uchikoshi and Kodaka's bread and butter has been the "death game" concept, in which a motley crew are forced to compete/cooperate for the sake of their lives. At first glance, it seems they've returned to that familiar well for World's End Club: A group of sixth grade students on a class trip are caught in an accident and awaken in an abandoned underwater amusement park, strange bangles now fastened to their wrists. They are greeted by an impish clown named Pielope who says they have one hour to complete individually assigned tasks, and only the first player to do so will have the option of escaping.

Thus begins the all-too familiar scenario of betrayal amongst friends and underhanded partnerships, under the gaze of a cutesy mascot guaranteed to appear on all promotional materials. Interesting, if not a little stale by this point. Ahhhh, but not soon after the game of fate kicks off, it's abruptly canceled! The students return to the surface to discover that some apocalyptic event has caused all the people to vanish, and stranger still, supernatural abilities begin manifesting in their adolescent frames . . .

Normally I'd be turned off by the bait-and-switch approach, but I did go into Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors not even knowing it was a visual novel, and that turned out for the best. Knowing the twist ahead of time does sap some of the joy of discovery out of World's End Club, though there are bound to be plenty more secrets to uncover the deeper you dive.



One of the big hooks here is the sharp divide between the game's dark story and the youth of the cast. The Zero Escape and Danganronpa titles starred participants of high school age and older, yet World's End Club dares to drop preteens into a decidedly adult situation and see how they react. Further highlighting that contrast is the art direction by Take, who has served as a human character designer on both Pokémon Sun & Moon and Sword & Shield. Can you imagine a Pokémon game in which the Trainers are in actual mortal danger at all times? Pretty wild, yes?

Each child has been themed after one of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac: Mowchan is beefy like a cow, the tiny firecracker Chuko has rat-like physical traits, Kansai wears a baseball uniform sporting the colors of the Hanshin Tigers team and so on. How exactly these assignments will factor into the greater story and the powers the kids develop remains a mystery, but at least you'll be able to clearly infer their personalities at a quick glance (traits that are certain to be subverted as the quest unfolds).

World's End Club is set to arrive on the Switch in Spring 2021, but if you want an early taste, you can play an extended demo right now on Apple Arcade. (It'll receive a major content update coinciding with the game's console launch.) **– TONY**

9.0

Bring in the Blockhead

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE: CHALLENGER PACK 7

THE LATEST SMASH shocker has landed: Minecraft Steve has joined the playable roster!

This is a character who's been in consideration, in the minds of speculative fans, for quite a while. And his chances of making the cut only went up after the reveal of Banjo and Kazooie at E3 2019 – both the Banjo and Minecraft brands are owned by Microsoft, so if they were OK with one of their characters joining the Smash cast, why not another? (Will Master Chief be next?)

Even still, it's still a shock to see Minecraft mixed in with this game that was already such an insane, impossible jumble of disparate IPs. The surprise, for me, is how faithful Masahiro Sakurai and his team decided to be to the source material in terms of visual style – most characters and worlds get at least *some* kind of graphical tweak when entering this fray of fighting franchises, but Steve looks like he was plucked as-is from a 10-year-old PC.

He's stiff. Inflexible. His attack range is woefully short since his arms are so stubby, and he can't leap for beans since his legs have no knees to give him any measure of springiness at all. Really, at first glance, he appears to be the least capable battler in the entire cast.

But just wait until he starts his mining and his crafting! Steve's basic abilities are intentionally limited because his real strength is one that no other character shares: He can literally mine the environment of the fighting arenas he finds himself in and use the raw materials he unearths to craft better items to use and stronger weapons to wield.

It's fascinating how they implemented this mechanic. Steve's Neutral Special while standing still is Mine, and he'll pull out his pickaxe and start procuring materials as long as you keep the B Button held down. Which materials he gets depends on where he's standing – if he's on a wooden platform, he'll get mostly wood. If he's on a stone surface, a bunch of rocks will land in his pocket. Iron is an especially critical element, and the developers made sure to place a source for it in every stage for Steve players to find – they literally had to rework every single arena in the game to make this one new move for this one new character work correctly. That's real dedication to getting the feel right!

After using Mine to gather up a lot of resources, you can then move Steve to his crafting table (which spawns in with you at the start of the match) and his Neutral changes into Craft. Your stockpile of supplies will transform into more powerful tools – particularly stronger swords, able to cause more damage and knockback to enemies when you swing it during Steve's basic moves.

Finally, when in the air, Neutral B makes a block appear directly under Steve's feet! You can make platforms or walls almost anywhere you please – though they're temporary, and only as durable as the materials used to build them. That's three different functions just for his Neutral Special!

Steve's arsenal also includes the power to make a minecart appear out of thin air (he builds rails one section at a time as it rolls); a TNT block set as his Down Special that can cause a ton of pain (but must be placed carefully); and the Elytra, a pair of gliding wings used for his Up Special recovery. That last one isn't dependent on the materials you've mined, thankfully – you'll always have a fighting chance to return.

Overall, it's yet another wildly different moveset that just further diversifies Ultimate all the more. A set of three alt character skins – Alex, Zombie and Enderman – give Minecraft fans even more nostalgia to love, and the new Minecraft World stage impressively includes six different "biomes" to see, so it's almost like six new stages in one!

Once again, Sakurai and his team have outdone themselves. Minecraft fans, this is a must-buy! **– LUCAS**

DLC PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO, SORA & BANDAI NAMCO RATING: E10+

Genres in a Blender

SUPERMASH

NOW THIS IS a great idea: Take multiple game genres, create a program that randomly mashes their gameplay elements together and enjoy the madness that ensues. Unfortunately, mashing up mediocrity with more mediocrity does not a good game make!

You are Tomo, a guy who works in a video game store with your sister and your friend. Your shop is in danger of being closed forever, and unless you can come up with a bunch of money, your dream job will be dead. Then one day you come across a box at a garage sale containing the mysterious Playtype Game Machine, a console with two cartridge slots that magically mixes up the contents of whatever games are plugged into it. That's where our tale begins.

As you play, Tomo is given various mash-up-related objectives to complete in order to advance the story. Once you finish them, you go talk to your sister and trigger the next long-winded story segment, then rinse and repeat. Customers also walk into your shop asking for specific mash-ups, which is weird considering that the Playtype Game Machine is supposed to be some kind of big secret that nobody but them knows about and the protagonists are still trying to figure out how to even use the crazy thing. It doesn't make much sense, and it's a perfect example of the thoughtlessness that permeates the entire game.

For instance, performing any of these tasks awards you random "dev cards" that are required to complete certain story objectives. As you can imagine, tying progression to random item drops is exactly as frustrating as it sounds, often leaving you to play bland mash-up after bland mash-up in hopes that the one item you need shows up so you can finally move on.

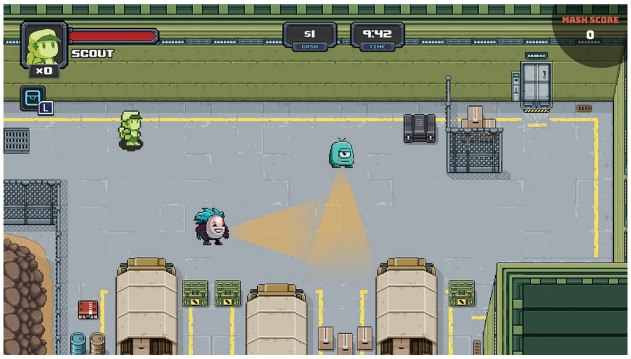
That, endless performance issues, grammatical errors in the text and more could be overcome if not for SuperMash's real problem: the "jack of all trades" issue. The idea of combining a shooter with a JRPG is great, but none of the basic elements that are being mashed up are very well made. The Metroidvania games have stiff jumping and uninspired environments. The shooters suffer from glitchy gameplay and overly simplistic enemy patterns. The JRPGs have poor hit detection and useless skills and spells. So yes, playing a platformer as a jumping jet plane is sort of funny at first glance, but it isn't actually fun to play, and that's the most important detail SuperMash overlooks.

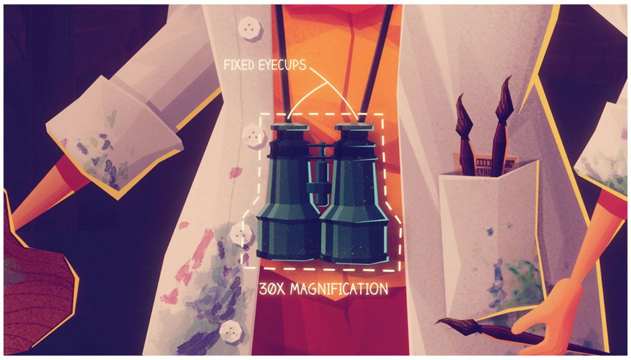
There were some moments of joy. I once mashed up JRPG and Stealth and wound up in a fantasy-style ice dungeon with modern security cameras on the walls, and whenever I got spotted the enemies would all rush me and trigger a turn-based battle. Ideas like that are the kind of thing that could have made SuperMash great, but the idea alone of mashing up games isn't enough. SuperMash's ambition is admirable, but its execution misses the mark.

Nobody likes seeing a great concept fail to live up to its potential, and SuperMash is a perfect example of that. Not everyone gets it right on their first try though, and I'd love to see Digital Continue give this concept another shake with a stronger focus on nailing the fundamentals. There's a good bone structure there. For now though, what we have is anything but "super." **— KRIS**

4.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: DIGITAL CONTINUE
RATING: E10+





Mom's Murder Mystery

JENNY LECLUE – DETECTIVÚ

TAKE THE SNARK of Ema Skye from the Ace Attorney games and transplant it into a bespectacled preteen with a love of coffee, decorating her notebook with stickers and crime scene investigation and you get Jenny LeClue, Detectivú! She's the main character of a series of mysteries written by Arthur K. Finklestein, and after 38 books, the publisher is pushing for a shake-up. Reluctantly, Finklestein decides that it's time for Jenny to start investigating her first murder.

Jenny lives with her mom Julie, a forensics professor at Gumboldt University, in the sleepy industrial town of Arthurton sometime in the early 1960s. After lamenting to her only friend about how boring everything is, Jenny's quest for the truth begins in earnest when Dean Strausberry is discovered dead in the library – and Julie is the prime suspect. As Jenny investigates, searches and interrogates, she uncovers a much deeper mystery than a simple murder.

Like the Ace Attorney games, you'll be searching the environment for interactable objects and potential clues (plus hidden extras like postcard puzzles and stickers) and interrogating suspects to draw a conclusion to the current mystery puzzle. There's no platforming, but you still have to navigate perilous terrain: underground mines, spooky graveyards and cousin Susie's cavity-inducing sugar pink bedroom. Jenny also traverses a lot of areas at night, and I found it a lot easier to navigate while playing with the Switch docked rather than in my hands. Still, the controls for everything are straightforward and presented on-screen, and there's no penalty for messing up a puzzle or presenting the wrong conclusion. Moving around and getting up on top of objects is a little tricky, however, and I actually ended up soft-locking a few times when events failed to trigger or a closer look at a puzzle wasn't properly exited. (There is an auto-save function, but it only triggers upon entering a new area of the map.)

One of the game's major mechanics is "Choosiness," wherein Jenny is given a choice between performing two different actions. The decisions can be as benign as deducing whether someone had a raspberry or strawberry jelly donut for breakfast, or as severe as actions that potentially go against any detective's moral code – like taking evidence from a crime scene. You can look back and see how the choices you make affect Jenny's personality in the end, and there are multiple endings to discover.

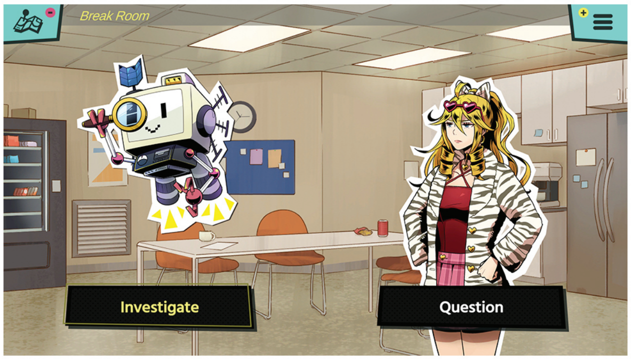
In terms of the subject matter, Jenny LeClue's a step up from Detective Pikachu and a step down from the Ace Attorney series, but it's still pretty heavy content – there are a few sequences where we're reminded that despite all of Jenny's excitement at finally getting to solve a real case, she's still a very scared young girl thrust into situations beyond her control, and a lot of the imagery is unsettling. I loved the story structure, which has the author acting as the narrator of Jenny's actions. There are times when the sentences he's writing appear as part of the scenery, which I wish would have happened more often.

However, the one issue I had with the story pacing was at the very end, where many of the major plot developments remain unresolved. The developers planned Jenny LeClue as a trilogy (continuing from the "true" ending), so hopefully there will be further adventures down the line.

All in all, it was an enthralling adventure with an eerie atmosphere that heightened the sense of danger and adventure, and it left me wanting more. If you loved Detective Pikachu, you're going to love Jenny LeClue. **– REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: MOGRAFI RATING: E10+

7.5



Integers & Interrogations

MURDER BY NUMBERS

NOT TO BE confused with the 2002 Sandra Bullock film of the same name, Murder by Numbers is the story of Honor Mizrahi, a woman who has just lost her job. She is (or was) an actress starring in a crime drama called "Murder Miss Terri" — but one day (the same day she's fired from her role on the show), the murders stop being fictional and start getting real. She finds herself in the middle of an actual crime scene at her studio!

Enter SCOUT, a quirky flying computer companion! This happy-to-help mobile analysis machine suddenly appears and strikes up a quick friendship with our newly employment-deprived leading lady. Soon, the out-of-work actress and hovering heap of PC parts are joining forces to try to solve the murder mystery in which they find themselves immersed!

Like many other games we're highlighting in this NF issue, Murder by Numbers is a blended-genre title that presents two styles of gameplay smashed together into a single experience. Honor represents one: She taps into her years of acting like a detective on TV and starts doing real police work like interrogating suspects. That side of the gameplay plays out like a visual novel, with lots of reading lengthy blocks of dialogue and choosing which questions to ask and when. On the other side of the partnership, SCOUT represents the second style of play: He examines crime scenes to find any pieces of evidence left strewn about, and when he targets one, his visual identification software kicks into gear in the form of a picross puzzle.

The picross puzzles are the real meat and potatoes here, and thankfully they're plentiful and varied. Some are small and easily solved in mere moments, but others are large, complex and can't be completed without significant knowledge of advanced picross-solving techniques. As a longtime picross fan myself, I was impressed at the array offered here and found myself tackling one after another after another for long stretches of time. Getting into a real picrossing zone, you know.

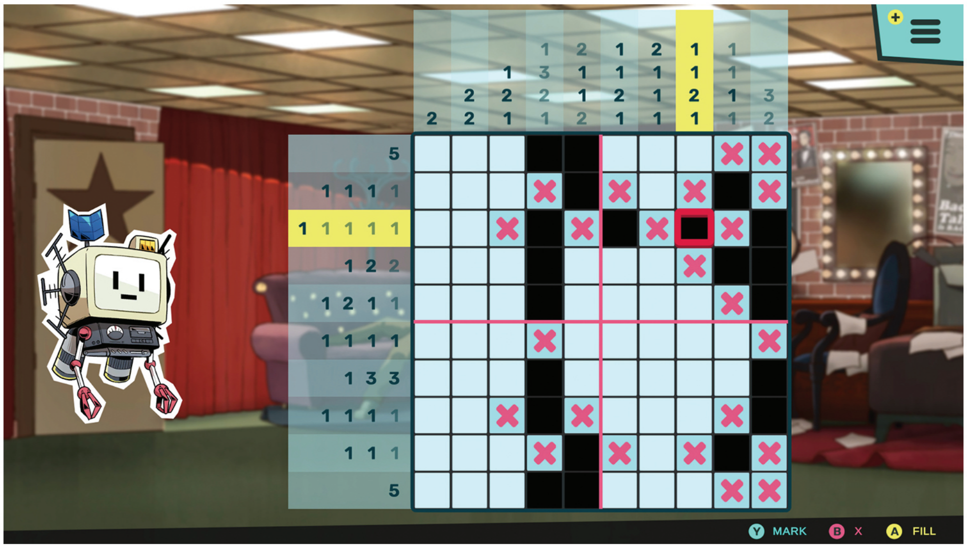
Some minor problems pop up here and there, like the highlighted clue numbers on the edge of the puzzles not always keeping current with the boxes you've marked within the puzzle itself. If you're eagle-eyed enough to notice the scant few times that happens, though, you're also smart enough to not be bothered.

Back on the visual novel side of things, I do wish the characters had been given unique left- and right-facing artwork. As it is, characters are animated in only a very limited manner, and their one standard pose is just mirrored when they change directions — so, for example, a character with tattoos on his right arm suddenly appears to have them on his left arm when he turns around.

On the whole, though, Murder by Numbers is a winning blend of two genres never previously mixed. Maybe we'll get a sequel? Honor might not be an actress any more, but her career as a detective should just be getting started! — **LUCAS**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: THE IRREGULAR CORPORATION DEVELOPER: MEDIATONIC RATING: T



Must Love Dogs

BEST FRIEND FOREVER

LET'S FACE IT, sometimes dating's a lot more fun when there's a furry friend that helps you break the ice with a potential special someone, which is what the main draw of Best Friend Forever is. However, its secondary draw? That dating sims and romance games can be for anyone *and* everyone – even though "must love dogs" is the overall theme here.

You are a freelance photographer who has relocated to singles hotspot Rainbow Bay, which also boasts one of the world's highest rates of dog ownership (as said in the info dump by the disc jockeys who narrate the start of your romantic journey). After adopting a new friend from the local animal shelter and clinic, your new life begins in earnest – both as a new pet parent *and* potential human partner. You have 15 weeks to develop your dog's stats – like trust, sociability and fitness – by setting up activities for each weekday, with periodic evaluations. One thing that I thought would have been useful was some beginning advice on what needs to be worked on the most.

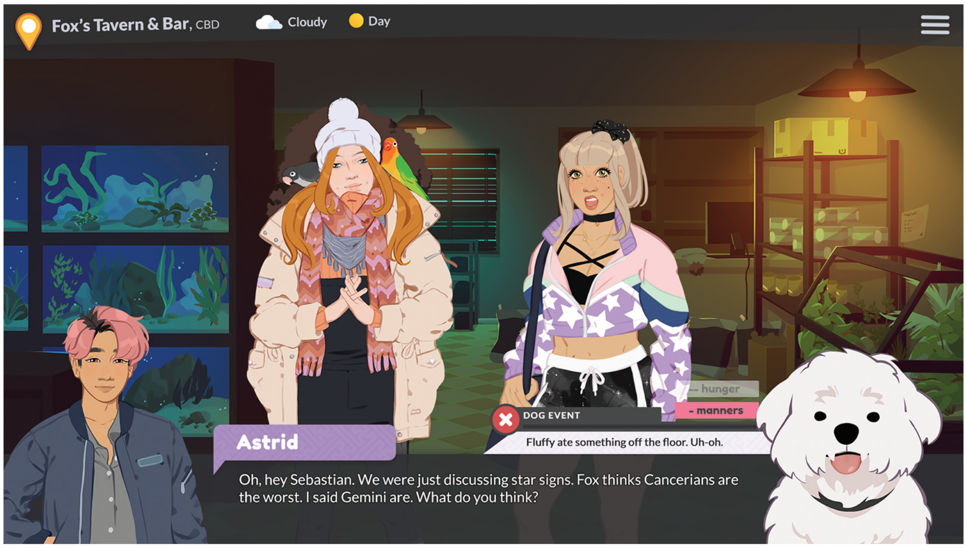
Encounters with other singles leave you with choosing a response that will hopefully unlock a date with them down the line. Unlike conventional visual novels with branching path stories that let you skip past dialogue you've already seen on subsequent playthroughs, Best Friend Forever doesn't have that option – because you also need to pay attention to your dog during each conversation! Misbehavior (and your dog's dirty business) can be easily curbed by clicking and dragging within a set time limit. As much as I like the option of fast-forwarding through text, this is a good reason for it to be left out.

This, unfortunately, raises my single biggest issue with Best Friend Forever: the interface. It's cursor-driven, which is fine if you're playing it handheld, but playing on the TV slows down your reaction speed considerably. The character creation screen has *three* dropdown menus, which could have been implemented better with radio buttons. While the developers at Starcolt have been responsive with patches, there were still many minor issues cropping up in dialogue and with character portraits a full month after the initial release.

The other singles of Rainbow Bay also have colorful personalities, although some of them shone a little bit brighter than the others. My personal favorites were Anders, an experienced family lawyer (in more ways than one, if you know what I mean) and his guide dog partner, Hemingway; aspiring Olympic figure skater Astrid and her fluffy princess Laika; and Sacha, a trans male activist for the underprivileged who lovingly dotes on his energetic pup, Marshmallow. I have to admit, while I enjoyed meeting and interacting with the humans, I wanted to see a little more personality from – and the ability to pet – their dogs as well.

I loved the premise when I first heard about it at the beginning of the year, but was a little disappointed in how the final product still needed some grooming. Still, if you're looking for a title that is written for the modern romance game fan and/or dog lover in mind, this one is worth fetching.

– REBECCA



7.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ALLIANCE
DEVELOPER: STARCOLT
RATING: T

Seek the Peak

A SHORT HIKE

THE RECEPTION'S TERRIBLE.

Claire is a young bird on vacation with her aunt. The only problem is that their vacation location, Hawk Peak Provincial Park, is so remote that her cell phone can't get a signal. She wants to check in with her Mom at home to make sure she's all right, so she sets out on a short hike to the one spot on the island that should be able to pick up a few bars and take a call: the peak of Hawk Peak itself.

A Short Hike is a quaint, wholesome open-world exploration game in which the open world is not very large. "Short" is an apt descriptor for this experience, since it can be fully completed within the span of a single afternoon; speedrunners are able to claim all of its most notable collectables and roll the credits in about 10 minutes flat. Short indeed.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: ADAM ROBINSON-YU
RATING: E

But don't dismiss it for lacking length! What little land lies around Hawk Peak is packed with secrets to discover, characters to meet and small sidequests to undertake. Sure, you can race to the mountaintop as fast as possible if you want to, but you'll have more fun getting into the laid-back vibe of the place, taking your time and fully appreciating everything the Provincial Park provides.

The gameplay is unique. While a lot of the sights can be seen simply by hiking to them – just walking with the Control Stick, easy as you please – the fact that our hero is a bird makes things more interesting once you've gained some elevation on the mountain. At any time, Claire can leap out into open air, extend her wings and gracefully glide back down to the ground below. You can guide her in twisting, turning loops above the treetops, seek out points of interest from her bird's-eye view and then swoop down upon them.

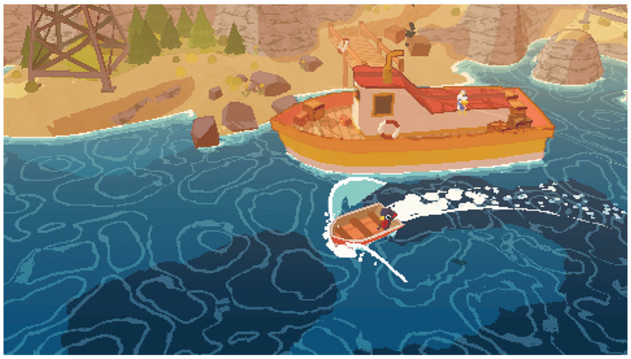
It's joyful! It just feels so nice to freely explore the sky in this world that has no enemies to oppose you. It's peaceful.

That's not to say there's no challenge involved, though. Getting to the top of Hawk Peak is kind of like solving a puzzle, since you have to find the right pathway to take you there, then you have to power up Claire's abilities in order to actually make the climb. By default, she can walk and glide, but she can't climb up sheer rock faces very well. You need to find Golden Feathers in order to boost her stamina little by little, giving her progressively more and more time to climb without tiring out and slipping back down the mountainside. The Feathers add depth to the design; you can choose to gather a lot of them to make the climb as easy as possible, or else you can opt to pick up only a handful and challenge yourself to pick out a path to the peak that accommodates more limited resources.

Probably the most striking thing about A Short Hike is its visual style, which is rendered in intentionally large "chunky" pixels. It tries to make itself look more low-res than it really is. You can choose a smoother style through an options menu, though, if the big, bulky blockiness is too offensive to your eyes. I didn't have too much trouble adjusting – my issue with the visuals was dealing with the game's camera. It always tries to keep the central peak in the background, which makes exploring the parts of the world placed further away from it awkward. You have to blindly fly "out of" the screen sometimes to discover places like the small surrounding islands (and the new drivable boat that creator Adam Robinson-Yu added to coincide with the Switch release of the game!).

A Short Hike is a heartwarming journey that doesn't last long, but will stick with you long after it's done. Spend an afternoon exploring with Claire, won't you? **– LUCAS**

9.0



The Original Anti-RPG

MOON

FLASHY MAGIC. Impractical weapons. Ferocious beasts. Toss these role-playing staples out the window and you're left with moon. (Yes, the lower-case "m" is intentional.)

Despite having never received a prior English release, Love-de-Lic's 1997 PlayStation curio nonetheless gained a cult following. Even Toby Fox cites moon as a major inspiration for Undertale! High praise indeed – but for every unconventional idea that turns the genre on its head, another wildly misses its mark.

Rather than a champion of justice, moon instead casts you as a young elementary school boy who's sucked into his favorite video game to bear witness to the actual Hero. From your perspective, the Hero's "heroic" deeds appear anything but – he boorishly bursts into people's homes, wears stolen lingerie over his armor and slaughters innocent animals for experience.

To clean up the Hero's mess, you catch animals' souls and reunite them with their corpses, thereby restoring their lives. You also meet an assortment of troubled NPCs whose dilemmas you resolve with the right tools or by simply lending a friendly ear. Consider if The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask was repurposed as a LucasArts adventure, with tons of items to exchange and puzzles to ponder, spread out across a week-long cycle rather than Termina's paltry three days!

All this Good Samaritan work awards Love and extends an Action Limit that dictates how long you can run around without sleep. You can barely keep your peepers open until nightfall at the start, so the opening hour becomes a harried race to collect Love as efficiently as possible, threatening to turn away all but the most stalwart players before the quest properly gets underway. It's rare that a game would be so demanding out of the gate, especially one billed as a relaxing celebration of pacifism.

From a young waitress with dreams of pop stardom to a ghost whose memory of life is a bit fractured, these characters' issues range from typical to bizarre. Art direction likewise doesn't follow a set template – the animals are molded out of clay! – creating a dreamlike atmosphere further heightened by each character's unique voice, which consist of scrambled samples of real-world languages like Spanish, French, English and others. As moon's main tagline implies, you can never be too sure if what you see is real or fantasy. Unsettling, but in a good way!

Unsettling in a bad way is all . . . the . . . waiting! Hoping for an animal soul to materialize at night? Until when? And who's to say you even deciphered the clues properly and met the right conditions? Guess you won't know until daybreak arrives and nobody shows up, huh? Then there's a fishing contest held on the first day of the week, and you must reel in five fish before time expires. Maybe the fish will bite quickly, or maybe your bobber will float undisturbed until the whistle blows. Got a bite? Nope! Just an old boot! Time's up! Better luck next week! I spent hours on this timesink, reloading my save file over and over, at the cruel mercy of RNG. What was I doing wrong? Absolutely nothing.

Even worse than the design blind spots is the inappropriate subject matter, like substance abuse. Your avatar may be a child, but that doesn't stop him from ordering cocktails at the bar or drinking a bottle of liquor to the point of unconsciousness. Most disturbing is one sudden act of domestic abuse. You pass by the home of a fireworks maker and overhear a marital spat, followed by the sound of a hard slap. Then the wife *forgives* him and . . . you earn Love!? Excuse me!? That's not kosher, even by 1997 standards!

Frustrations and rare moments of disgust aside, moon is an unusual experiment in RPG parody/deconstruction that deserves to at least be sampled. Even if the Love doesn't take absolute control of you – it certainly didn't for me – the experience is enlightening all the same. **– TONY**

6.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ONION GAMES DEVELOPERS: ONION GAMES & LOVE-DE-LIC RATING: T

Turn-Based Brawling

TREACHERY IN BEATDOWN CITY

PEOPLE ARE OFTEN blind to their own biases. For instance, a lot of people think they love beat-'em-ups, but the reality is that most folks get bored with them after a couple of levels, especially when playing solo. That's in part because the genre is so prone to becoming brainless. The loop for most brawlers is: 1) Get to an enemy, 2) hit them before they hit you, 3) retreat if more enemies come from behind you and 4) repeat. It's a formula that can get old fast, even with the best art and character design.

Treachery in Beatdown City deftly avoids that blow to playability by digging into what makes beat-'em-ups tick. It also gets into what makes people and society tick, turning over the rocks in our culture where the bigoted, cruel powers-that-be often hide and exposing them for what they are. In that way, the game works as an explanation for both why people resort to street violence, and how combat engines in brawlers allow them to win those fights.

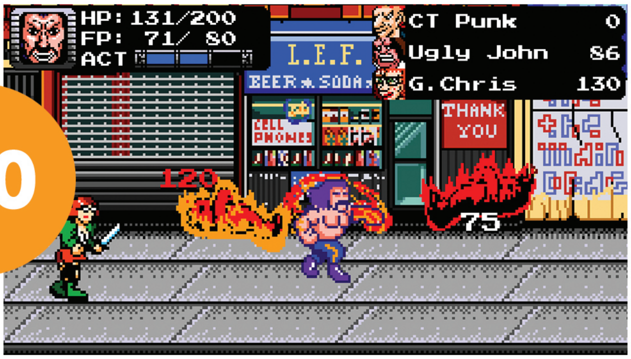
Instead of using real-time action, Treachery employs a turn-based battle system. That means more planning and less spamming the attack button. You can take your time to choose to throw out a big risky move, go for an unblockable throw or a toss out a counter in hopes of catching your rival off guard. Sometimes the best plan is to charge your meter for a big attack; other times it's better to whittle an opponent down, then finish them after they're too drained to defend themselves. Getting to know each enemy type takes time, and with three characters to play as, there's plenty of depth to be mined here. Just don't go in expecting it to be a walk in the park. Exploring and eventually conquering the streets of Beatdown City will take patience and perseverance.

Written by Shawn Alexander Allen, a New Yorker who once worked on the team responsible for Grand Theft Auto IV, Treachery is clearly a reflection of both his life in the city and his thoughts on games in which you break all the rules (and people's faces). Many of the characters here are taken right out of his own life, from parodies of politicians like Mike Bloomberg and Barack Obama to smaller, day-to-day interactions with regular people on the street who absolutely refuse to treat you like a human being. Where in Rockstar's games the protagonists are prone to unjustified violence, the three leads here – Lisa, a boxer and MMA fighter struggling with also being the daughter of the chief of police; Brad, a retired pro wrestler who organizes community events; and Bruce, a financial genius, otaku geek and master of both Jeet Kune Do and Capoeira – are all reacting to a world of bigots, sociopaths and demagogues. When given the choice to respond with surrender or aggression, they choose the latter, leading them on a path that, in time, will reveal the greatest villain the modern world has ever seen.

As big as that is, Treachery itself is not a huge game. Like a crusty punk single, it doesn't run for very long, and its brash style defies opportunities to follow the crowd at every turn. There's more content on the way – designed to follow up on the cliffhanger ending – but players should be warned that they won't be playing this one for hundreds of hours before it's all over. It does offer a special kind of escapism, though, allowing you to jump into a fantasy version of New York where marginalized people can literally fight back against those who refuse to acknowledge that their lives matter. We can only hope that in the real world, that fight ends on the right side of justice sooner rather than later. **– JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NUCHALLENGER DEVELOPERS: NUCHALLENGER & HURAKANWORKS RATING: T

8.0



Manic Multiplayer Mario

SUPER MARIO BROS. 35

DO YOU ENJOY World 1-1 in the original Super Mario Bros. so much that you'd want to play it hundreds of times? If so, have I got the game for you!

Super Mario Bros. 35 follows in the footsteps of Tetris 99, in that it's a free-to-play free-for-all available to Nintendo Switch Online subscribers. And like Tetris 99, players go head-to-head with dozens of other combatants in a battle royale of skills until a single victor is left standing.

Of course, instead of clearing lines by the quartet, you'll be putting your platformer skills to the test in a modified version of the original Super Mario Bros.! The goal is simply to stay alive as long as possible, and while there's an in-game timer, precision and care are usually more important than blazing through the stages. After all, going out of your way to defeat enemies will add precious seconds onto your clock – and instantly send those foes over to haunt a rival! Of course, they can bat the same baddies back to you, which can lead to some truly frenetic groupings of foes in these familiar locales. It's a simple idea, but an effective one, giving players a fresh way to revisit this classic. The $0.00 price tag only sweetens the deal!

The controls are similar to the original game, but have been adjusted in small ways (such as giving players a high jump off of enemies) that may take a little getting used to. And impressively, everything runs as smooth as butter, even when you've been inundated with hundreds of Lakitus throwing thousands of Spinies into a course!

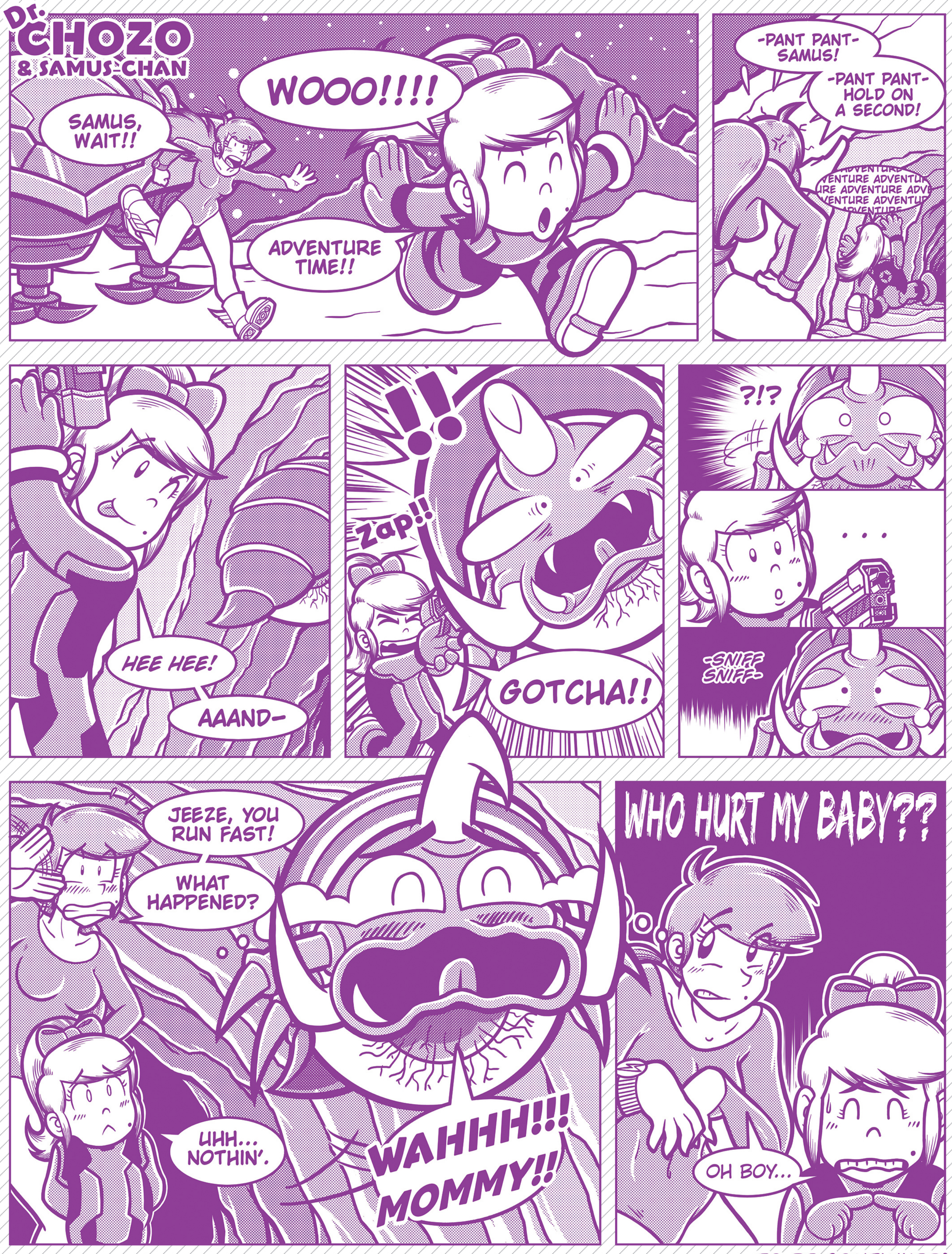
However, SMB35 features a somewhat strange way of unlocking courses: It only picks from the set of levels that each of the players has voted for. And since everyone just starts with the first few courses in the game, it can take a very long time to even get to a level like 4-1 to see some of those aforementioned Lakitus (the in-game Warp Zones only take you to other stages already in the rotation). As a result, you'll play levels like 1-1 and 1-2 a ridiculous number of times, often looping back on themselves. It's here where the cracks show and I feel like I'm getting Mario 1 overload. And after a time, the idea that a classic, genre-defining stage like 1-1 was being reduced to pseudo-grindy filler began to make the game feel cynical. Plus, the repetition of early stages allows players to rack up resources such as extra time and coins (which can be used in a Mario Kart-style item roulette to keep you alive longer), meaning when it's down to the last few Marios, it can take a very long time for one of them to get defeated.

The result of all this is a fun bonus game that could use a few tweaks. I'd suggest having the timer speed up more quickly than it currently does, and having no stage in the rotation repeat until everyone's stage choices have been played. Some Lost Levels additions would be great too. Even so, it's certainly worth a shot and can be quite frenetic and fun, especially when you break out of the World 1-1 cycle!

– MATTHEW T.

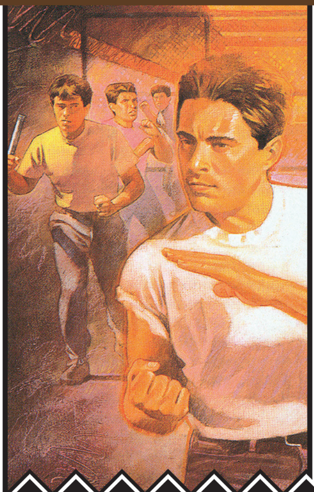
7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E



BY THOR THORVALDSON

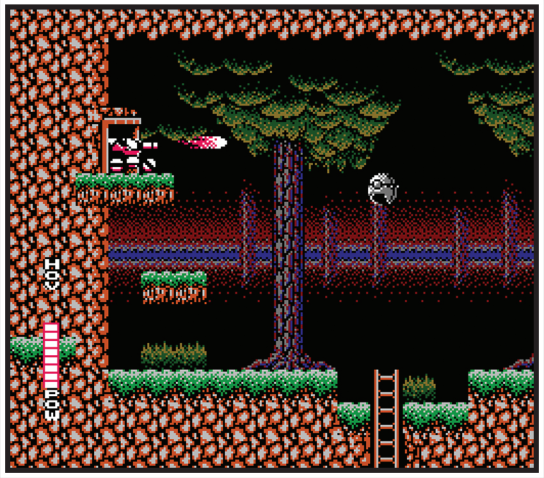
TO BE CONTINUED!



peanut butter & CHOCOLATE

Most video games fall neatly into simple categories. Defined genres. Some defiant designs, though, dare to cause those categories to clash. We present, for your approval, our picks for gaming's greatest genre mash-ups!

METROIDVANIA



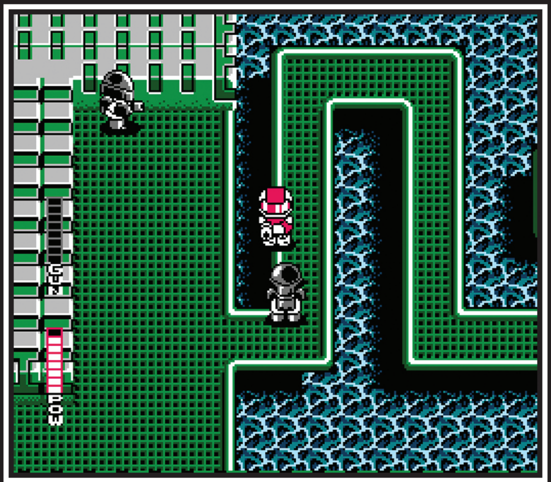
BLASTER MASTER

WHAT IF YOU took Metroid and Zelda for NES, stuck them in a blender and added an absurd story about a boy named Jason jumping into a futuristic tank and blasting hordes of vile mutants to save his pet frog? You'd get Blaster Master, one of the coolest genre mash-ups of all time.

Like Metroid, Blaster Master is a sidescrolling 2D platformer that involves multidirectional shooting, exploration and a power-up system that revolves around giving the player new abilities to help them traverse the game's massive interconnected map. Instead of an intergalactic bounty hunter in a space suit, you play as a jumping tank, which gives the platforming a unique sense of weight. But that's only half of the story.

The other half comes in the form of top-down action segments that bear more of a resemblance to The Legend of Zelda. At any point during the adventure, you can jump out of your tank and move around on foot. For the bulk of the game, that leaves you incredibly vulnerable, but strewn about the map are multiple small doors that your tank can't fit into. Enter them as Jason and the perspective shifts to an overhead view, where you can now explore a totally different set of mazes filled with traps, monsters and more. These overhead segments are also where you find all of the game's enormous bosses. Defeating them awards you a new power-up for your tank, like the ability to drive up walls, shoot through barriers and even hover!

Blaster Master successfully and seamlessly combined the best of what games like Metroid and Zelda had to offer, then wrapped it up in an absurd yet memorable world. It's fun, it's challenging and it's still a must-play! **— KRIS**



TOP-DOWN ACTION

BRAWLER

RIVER CITY RANSOM

KUNG FU MASTER. Double Dragon. Final Fight. Streets of Rage. Pillars of the beat-'em-up genre that opened the gates for many a quarter-muncher throughout the '80s and '90s that sought to separate themselves from the pack. But for all their flashy fighters and even flashier moves, every one had a particular trait in common: They're so *boooooooooooooring!*

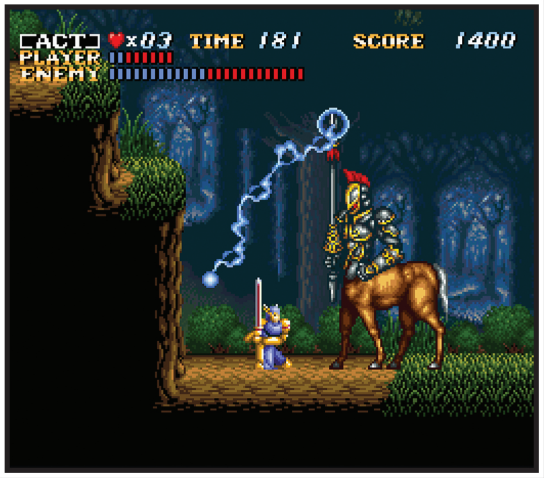
OK, that's an exaggeration. You've gotta agree, though, that brawlers are not the most complex games around – punch some dudes, walk forward, punch the same dudes but now wearing blue shirts instead of red, then walk some more. Player characters don't evolve as you progress, so any challenge typically boils down to how many rows of cookie-cutter mooks you can dust before they dust you.

But while all those other saps were lazing about in their comfort zone, River City Ransom snuck up behind them and knocked 'em cold with Stone Hands! The incorporation of an RPG system with a staggering 10 attributes to upgrade – from Strength and Agility to Stamina and Willpower – meant that players were given agency to craft their ideal warrior. You could even purchase martial arts self-help books to add wild new techniques to your arsenal!

Are you still bulldozing through waves of palette-swapped pugilists? Of course. And is it more than a little dumb that stat building is dependent on consuming food rather than earning experience through combat? You better believe it. River City Ransom may not have been perfect, but it sowed the seeds of a new kind of brawler based around customization and experimentation. (Modern classics like Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game are fruits plucked from that vine!) **— TONY**

ROLE-PLAYING

ACTION



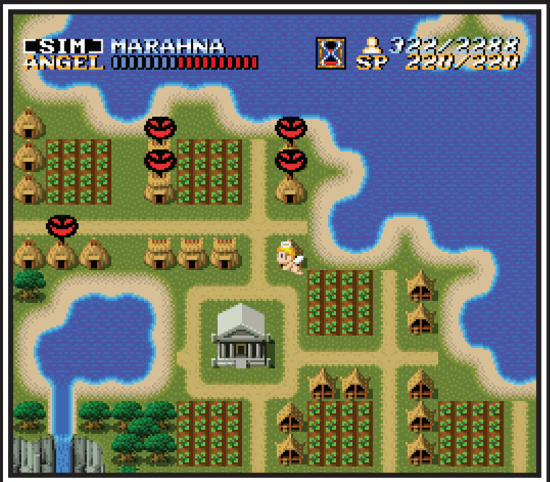
ACTRAISER

THE SUPER NES didn't have to wait long to see its first genre blend, as the enterprising ActRaiser arrived just a few months after the hardware's launch in 1991.

Through its opening minutes, it didn't tip its full hand. It began with a sidescrolling action sequence starring a sword-wielding champion carving his way through sinister fantasy creatures in a forest – a scene not at all dissimilar from its 16-bit launch window contemporary, Super Castlevania IV. But after putting an end to the first boss, a second action stage didn't appear. Rather, players got a total perspective shift and gained control of a cutesy angel avatar hovering over a squared-off landscape!

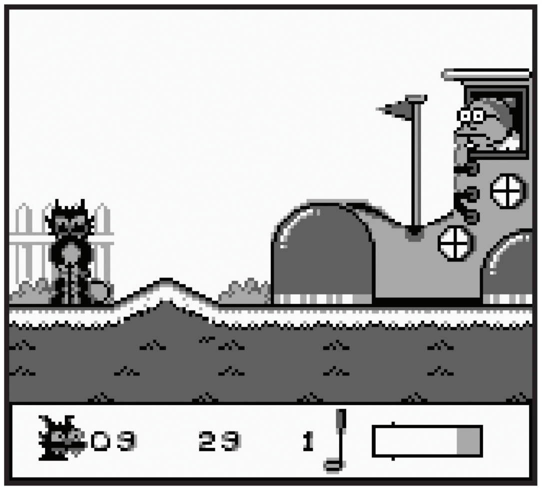
Seriously, the screenshots look like they came from two totally different games. But somehow ActRaiser managed to expertly balance two wildly unique modes of play: the running, jumping and sword-swinging action scenes and the cherubic "god game" chapters that bridged the gaps between them. In the sim mode, you directed the growth of a human civilization in a variety of challenging landscapes, using your celestial powers to melt snow away from frozen tundra or irrigate farmland in the desert with an on-the-spot rainstorm. Enemies didn't only oppose you when you had a sword in hand, though – flying demons also assaulted your angel in the sim scenes, and you'd have to respond with your best Kid Icarus impression and shoot them out of the sky with a bow and arrow.

A masterpiece-tier soundtrack composed by Yuzo Koshiro elevated the entire experience even further. Altogether, early adopters of the SNES were truly blessed to have been offered ActRaiser! **– LUCAS**



SIMULATION

GOLF

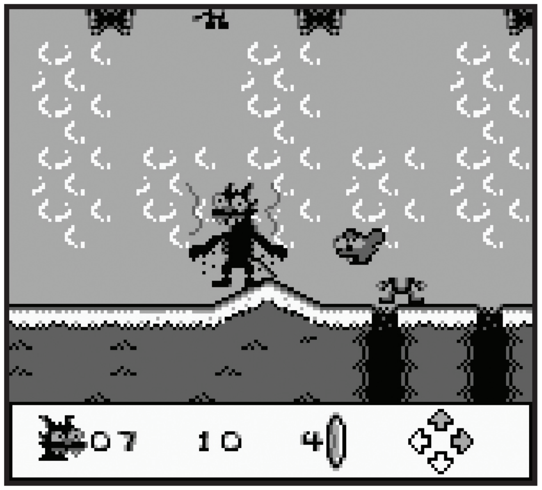


ITCHY & SCRATCHY IN MINIATURE GOLF MADNESS

I'VE BEEN WATCHING a whole lot of classic Simpsons episodes via Disney Plus recently, so the frequently reoccuring show-within-a-show within that show, The Itchy & Scratchy Show, was at the forefront of my mind as we planned this feature. And, wouldn't you know, that ultra-violent pair of cartoon critters somehow managed to score their own genre mash-up video game decades ago!

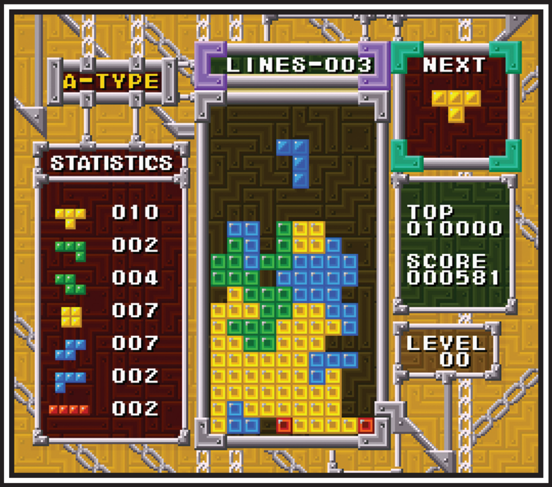
Itchy & Scratchy in Miniature Golf Madness is one of the most obscure Simpsons tie-in games ever made, and it also serves as one of very few examples of an original Game Boy game trying to shove two separate playstyles of gaming together. On one hand, it's a miniature golf sim, as you, controlling Scratchy the Cat, attempt to putt a golf ball over, under and around a wild array of obstacles in order to get it into the hole at the end of each course in as few strokes as possible. On the other, it's a platforming challenge, as everything's presented from a traditional 2D sidescrolling perspective – so you have to also move Scratchy himself through the same set of obstacles, just surviving long enough to escort the ball all the way to its home.

But good luck with that! Because that murderous mouse Itchy pops up around every corner with some crazy new weapon, constantly seeking to take away one of Scratchy's nine lives! You can turn the tables on him too . . . or sometimes meet a mutual end. (Below, a rocket launcher has just cooked the cat, while a well-tossed Frisbee deprived the mouse of his head.) Ah, low-res, four-color cartoon gore. **– LUCAS**



PLATFORMER

PUZZLE



TETRIS & DR. MARIO

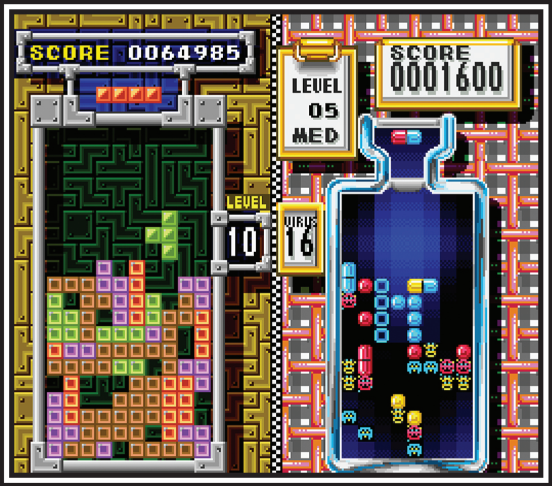
HOW CAN A genre get mashed up with itself? Well, it happens when two iconic brands – each with their own defined style of play – decide to cross over and go head-to-head inside the same cartridge.

At the tail end of the '80s and extending well into the '90s, there was no stopping Tetris. Nintendo's brilliant decision to make it the pack-in game included with the original Game Boy propelled its popularity to unheard-of heights – that version alone sold over 35,000,000 copies worldwide! Such massive success on one system meant it would be ported to many other platforms after that . . . but when it came time to bring it to the Super Nintendo, it didn't arrive alone!

Dr. Mario, Nintendo's own in-house take on the "falling block" style of puzzle games, tagged along to create the then-rare value of getting two games in one. The two designs were distinct – Tetris' goal being to clear out lines of horizontal blocks from a constantly filling playing field, while Dr. Mario's was more about matching colors and setting up combos – but there was enough shared DNA between the two to make them a perfect match when mixed together.

And that's exactly what this combo cartridge offered! You could play either game individually, but the star of the show was "Mixed Match" mode that fused the two together. You'd first play a round of B-Type Tetris, seeking to clear lines as quickly as possible. Then a round of Dr. Mario, trying to zap all the viruses as fast as you could. Finally, with all the time remaining on the clock, you'd play A-Type Tetris and try to rack up as high a score as possible, in order to beat your opponent's total!

It was a brilliant blend, and now, decades later, we can appreciate how it paved the way for the likes of Puyo Puyo Tetris! **– LUCAS**



PUZZLE

PUZZLE

SUPER PUZZLE FIGHTER II TURBO

SEVERAL PUZZLE GAMES – like Tetris & Dr. Mario – had utilized versus modes before Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo. But none were quite like this: Rather than just competing for a high score at the same time as your opponent, here you attacked them with punches and kicks!

There never was a Super Puzzle Fighter I, as this game's name was just a goofy parody of Super Street Fighter II Turbo (also made by Capcom). It utilizes matching gameplay in which different colored gems fall into place, then crash gems make them explode when contact is made. The goal is to link combos together by causing chain reactions when the pieces cascade. Big combos mean more attacks are made on the opponent. Rather than using life bars, the game sends these attacks in the form of counter gems. Counter gems are garbage pieces that have a countdown. When the timer reaches zero, they simply turn into regular gems, but can seriously mess up planning and strategy. Gems can also be combined to create squares and rectangles for bigger combos, and the diamond crash gem can eliminate all gems of a certain color. It's a lot like Puyo Puyo, but with unique twists and turns.

So it's just another puzzler, right? The part that makes the game special is its fighting aspect and feel, where characters from Street Fighter and Darkstalkers brawl, actually sending the garbage with special moves. Ryu, Ken, Sakura and Chun-Li represent Street Fighter, while Felicia, Morrigan, Donovan and Hsien-Ko hail from Darkstalkers. Not a huge roster, but it hits all the most popular or game-defining characters. Playing the different modes helps unlock new characters, skins and icons. Speaking of different versions, the later titles added Y Mode and Z Mode, which were different styles of play. While X Mode was just the original arcade mode, Y Mode changed the gameplay to having gems explode when three or more touched. Z Mode made the gems rise from the bottom, and a cursor swapped them to create matches to destroy gems. All of the characters are in "chibi" form, making them tinier with exaggerated features and scrunched proportions. While there are no life bars or button combinations, the presentation does make it feel more like a fight than most puzzle battlers.

After its debut in arcades in 1996, Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo was ported to virtually every platform of the era – PS1, Dreamcast, Saturn and more – but it only graced the Nintendo world once, on Game Boy Advance. That version was stripped of many of the most fluid character animations, but the puzzling worked just the same! **– BRETT**

FIGHTER

PLATFORMER

DONKEY KONG JUNGLE BEAT

IN SOME WAYS, Donkey Kong Jungle Beat felt kind of like a spiritual successor of sorts to an earlier Nintendo mash-up title, Gumshoe (see Page 51). Another sidescrolling platformer, this time the King of Swing took on a new role as the Prince of Pound when players took control with a most unlikely peripheral: the DK Bongos!

Using the DK Bongos (a special GameCube controller that literally was a pair of plastic bongo drums), you tapped the right drum to move DK right, the left drum for left, and both together to jump. Clapping your hands in front of the mic made DK clap in the game, initiating his Sound Wave attack to thwart enemies, as well as grab bananas, with combos multiplying your score and adding to your total number of "beats." DK even got some new Jungle Buddies to aid him in his quest, with similar controls.

That only accounted for part of the experience, however, as then we had the bosses. While the various Rocs, Tusks and Hogs each had their own certain method of attacking and being toppled, it was the Evil Kings – Dread Kong, Karate Kong, Ninja Kong and Sumo Kong – who stole the show by engaging DK in straight-up one-on-one fistfights. In a very Punch-Out!!-like manner, you needed to watch how they moved, dodge at just the right time, then pummel them with a pounding of bongos to knock some sense into them.

Four years after its debut, Nintendo brought this title to the Wii with a new twist as a part of their "New Play Control!" line of GameCube titles ported to the motion-sensing system. Rather than the DK Bongos (which Nintendo omitted support for here, despite the first model of the Wii featuring compatibility), this version instead utilized the Wii Remote and Nunchuk in a slightly different fashion, as players shook the controllers like a pair of drumsticks, while movement was performed by more conventional means. Along with some other tweaks, the Wii version was easier to get through, but arguably not quite as engaging. **– DAVID**

RHYTHM

ACTION RPG

SIGMA STAR SAGA

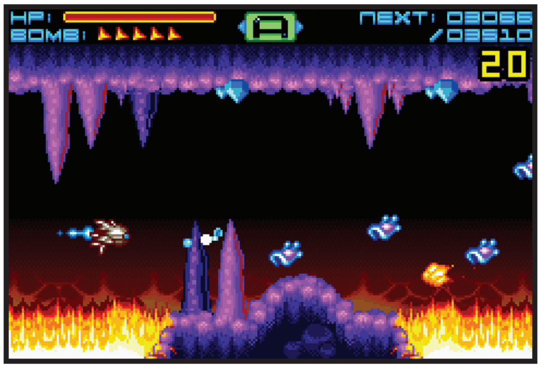
HALFWAY THROUGH THE 00s (Aughts? Zeroes? How have we decided to refer to that decade anyway?) . . . anyway! The year was 2005, and WayForward was in the middle of a season almost entirely defined by developing movie and TV cartoon IP tie-in games. They did a couple of SpongeBob games. Some Barbie adventures. An adaptation of The Scorpion King, a Godzilla title and even managed to play both sides of the comics industry by tackling both an X-Men game for Marvel and a Justice League title for DC. No doubt they were thrilled for all of those opportunities . . . *but* they needed a chance to present a unique, original idea for a breather from all that contract work!

Enter Sigma Star Saga. This Game Boy Advance epic was 100% new and crafted entirely by the creative minds at WayForward – and since it represented a rare chance for them to create their own world instead of working in someone else's, they took double advantage of the moment and made a double-genre game!

It began as a forced-scrolling shoot-'em-up, with players in the cockpit of a starship fighting off a force of invading aliens. After downing the first boss, though, the perspective shifted to a top-down view of the victorious pilot, Ian Recker, getting a new assignment from his commanding officer: Go undercover in the enemy army! One month later, he's in. Ian's infiltrated the sinister forces of the Krill and been conscripted into their service – a deal that includes having a cycloptic parasite forcibly attached to his body!

As this new half man, half alien hybrid, players were then tasked to explore top-down areas, blast baddies with a handy ray gun and seek out items and upgrades. Action regularly bounced back to more shoot-'em-up sequences, in which you could take advantage of the treasure you'd gathered on foot to soup up your starships with better weapons. That was a critical point of connection that helped the journey feel more like one cohesive whole.

Sigma Star Saga was an ambitious effort, but ultimately didn't end up being much of a hit for WayForward. It launched on GBA well after the DS had already debuted, so players might have already moved on. But then, that's the same story Shantae had, and they ultimately got to bring her back and build her into a major brand! So perhaps there's still a future for Ian Recker written in the stars. **– LUCAS**



SHOOTER

STRATEGY

ODAMA

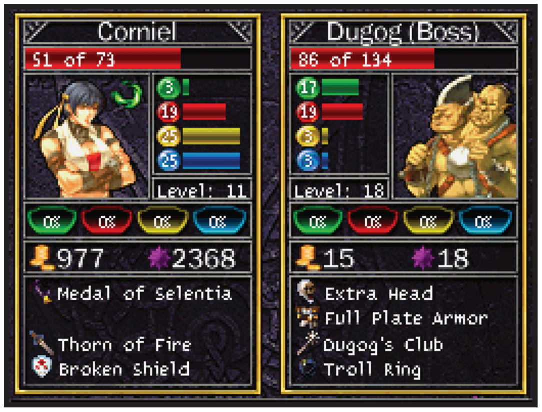
"YO NINTENDO! Oh, Crescendo!" That's the chorus to the theme song for Odama, one of the most inspired, surprising games the Big N has ever released. Proving once again that he is incapable of designing a run-of-the-mill experience, Yoot Saito – creator of Seaman and Aero Porter and close friend to the late Nintendo president Satoru Iwata – directed this one-of-a-kind GameCube title that's a head-scratcher to this day. Part virtual pinball, part military general sim, Odama puts you in the role of Yamanouchi Kagetora, a rookie general who fights under the banner of "Ninten-do," which in the game means "the way of heavenly duty." His goal is vengeance, and he means to get it by leading his army through battlefield after battlefield, claiming victory each time they're able to bring a giant bell through enemy territory.

If that sounds like it borders on ordinary, just wait until you check out the Ninten-do army's secret weapon: the titular Odama. Using a giant catapult and a series of equally huge, paddle-like devices, you can launch this huge killer ball into the fray, bowling over everything from enemy forces to local landmarks . . . and even your own men! That's where the special peripheral microphone comes in. Using real voice commands like "Rally!" and "Fall Back!" you can direct your men out of the Odama's way (though if their morale drops too low, they may ignore you). You can also launch food onto the battlefield to attract the enemy to certain areas of the screen to make them easier targets, or change the Odama into a holy orb that converts any person it touches into a new trooper for your righteous Ninten-do force.

As soldiers exclaim comically morbid last words like "The horror!" and "We're done for!" through text balloons as they're run over by the death orb, it's easy to see Odama as a sort of dark comedy commentary on the absurdity of war. (The bonus level that takes place in modern Kyoto, right outside Nintendo headquarters, is even more meta.) But no matter your read on the game's greater meaning, there's no denying that this is one ball like no other! **– JONATHAN**

PINBALL

ROLE-PLAYING



PUZZLE QUEST: CHALLENGE OF THE WARLORDS

LET'S FACE IT: For all their strengths, traditional role-playing games can get a little repetitive at times. Turn-based battles always boil down to selecting the same few choices from a menu screen over and over, and when you have to grind for experience points so you're strong enough to face a boss, the whole thing can start to feel more like homework than a grand adventure. If only there were some way to make the tedious experience of random encounters a little more engaging? If the player really must do the same thing over and over again, why not get them doing something that's a bit more mentally stimulating – such as playing a jewel-based puzzle game?

That's the logic behind Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords, a game that's one part Final Fantasy, one part Bejeweled. Players do battle by matching colored gems, then unleashing powerful magic attacks to defeat their enemies. The result is a core gameplay loop that never gets tiring, no matter how many times you replay the same battles. The combination of these two genres speaks to something buried deep within the human psyche, as you get visceral satisfaction from solving complex puzzles, alongside the exhilaration of watching numbers rise as your character slowly levels up.

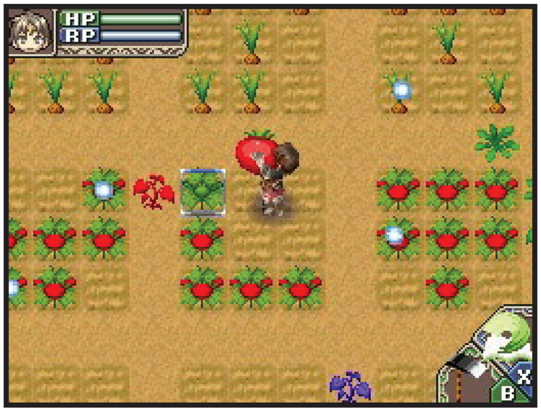
In the modern era, it's not unsurprising for a puzzle game to feature an RPG-style leveling system – indeed, this is the formula that makes games like Candy Crush so addictive. When Puzzle Quest first launched, though, it felt revolutionary, and given its success, it's no wonder so many games have copied this approach of mixing RPG elements into other types of games.

Yet none of its copycats have quite managed to nail its narrative element: Puzzle Quest also told a high fantasy tale of heroes and villains, wizards and monsters, swords and sorcery. This combination of engaging gameplay and storytelling is what made the game truly stand out among an endless sea of pretenders! **– MATTHEW L.**

PUZZLE

FARMING SIM

POINT & CLICK



RUNE FACTORY

WHILE RUNE FACTORY was marketed as "A Fantasy Harvest Moon" when it was first released for the Nintendo DS in 2006, it was quick to put down its own roots and branch off from the series that inspired it. Now, it's a franchise in its own right, with four main titles, two spin-offs, an updated special edition and an upcoming sequel set to release on the Nintendo Switch in 2021! Take a fantasy world with swords and sorcery, monsters and mythical creatures, then add a humble farmer and their charming village home – the stuff of many a Western fantasy novel. No wonder there's so much love for this series!

The main protagonist of every Rune Factory game is an amnesiac newcomer to town who is taken in and given their own plot of land and home to maintain. The mundane activities of growing crops, tending livestock and forming bonds with your new neighbors are then joined by the real issue at hand: a sudden influx of monsters summoned from a distant plane that are plaguing the countryside, with a mysterious puppet master pulling the strings of a sinister plot with dire consequences. That's when your hero takes a weapon in hand, prepares their spellbook and goes off to conquer the dungeons – hopefully also learning more about themselves and their lost memories in the process!

Where Rune Factory shines is how well the farming and crafting mechanics of Harvest Moon/Story of Seasons mesh with the typical action RPG combat seen in titles like Secret of Mana or The Legend of Zelda. Daily chores like watering crops, taking care of livestock and clearing debris raise your farming stats and unlock advanced recipes. Crops, fish and livestock products can be cooked into food that will improve your battle stats. Monster loot, minerals and materials like wood and stone can be crafted into weapons, armor and medicines that will give you an advantage in battle. Even the ones you love can help you out: In the later games in the series, you're able to take your current romantic partner (and after you marry, the whole family!) out on an expedition to defeat evil together! **– REBECCA**

ZACK & WIKI: QUEST FOR BARBAROS' TREASURE

THIS TITLE TENDS to fall into the "underrated gems" category of any Wii games list. Touted as a point & click adventure/puzzle game, Zack & Wiki was the victim of a hard-to-market premise and was easily overshadowed by games like Super Mario Galaxy in the 2007 holiday shopping season. For those who were looking for a unique experience, Zack & Wiki delivered – and it became a critical darling, scoring several sparkling reviews. The sales told a different story, unfortunately, but those lucky enough to take the plunge were treated to a great game.

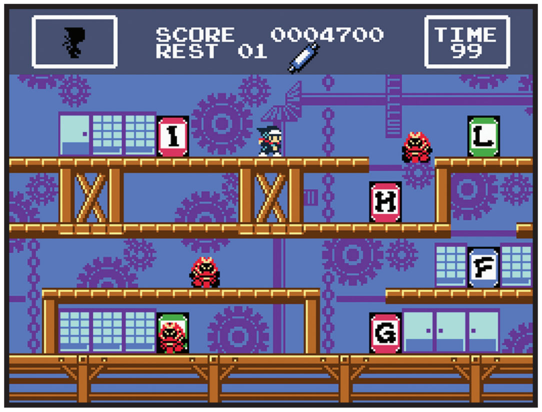
Zack is a member of a pirate gang called the Sea Rabbits, and with his pal Wiki (a golden monkey who can transform into a bell) they hunt for treasure. While out searching, they crash-land on an island and find the legendary pirate captain Barbaros – or at least, what's left of him. He's now just a talking skull who promises Zack untold treasure if he can piece him back together. The stage is set! (Oh, and the rival Rose Rock pirates are also after the treasure.)

The game takes place in little dioramas in which the camera is mostly fixed on the scene before you. Zack can interact with various items and simple machines, or ring Wiki to turn enemies into useful tools. Sounds nuts, but it's very creative! Most enemies turn into totems, but sometimes snakes turn into grabbing tools or centipedes into saws. Certain items shift the perspective to first-person, where Zack uses waggle controls to operate switches and cranks. It's all a bit contrived, but so were most third-party ideas of how to use the Wii Remote back then. At least it worked, and was fun! Some puzzles relied more on getting around quickly or quietly, while others were more brain-bending. The puzzles became a bit too difficult in later levels for the proposed target demographic, but were very rewarding when solved. The story was also cute, the ending had a nice twist and the game looked great. With such great production values, it's obvious the property was supposed to be bigger than it ended up being – but it will likely remain just an ill-fated attempt at a new IP for Capcom. **– BRETT**

ACTION RPG

PUZZLE

GAMES!



RETRO GAME CHALLENGE

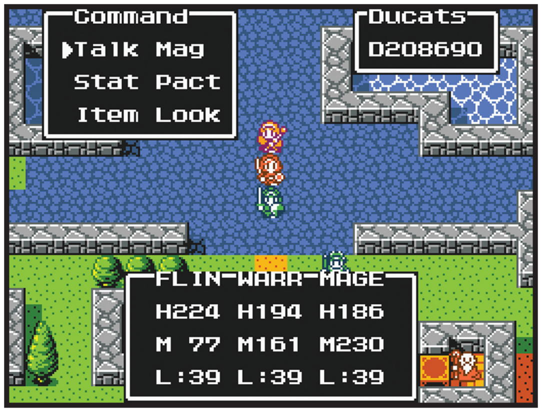
A CURSORY GLANCE at the multitude of remakes, reboots and reimaginings these days makes one fact abundantly clear: nostalgia is huge! Video games get a lot of mileage from leaning into the classic days of yore, with even modern games evoking pixel art and chiptunes.

Retro Game Challenge took childhood memories a step further, however. Rather than simply looking like classic 8-bit titles, it totally enveloped the player in the very culture of '80s video gaming! You'd play games on the top DS screen while, on the bottom, your character would sit on your buddy's bedroom floor, thumb through gaming magazines and reflect on playground rumors that may or may not be true!

The bonkers plot – based loosely on the Japanese variety/game show Game Center CX – involved comedian Shinya Arino presenting a number of challenges for the player to overcome. As it goes, Arino decides to send you back in time to hang out with his own kid self!

Make no mistake, though – this isn't a compilation cart. Rather, everything you're playing through is an original "fake" NES/Famicom game, full of new characters and secrets. The eight titles on display include shmups, platformers, action games, a couple of racers and, incredibly, a decent little Dragon Quest-style JRPG that's over a dozen hours long! And not only are the games parodies and homages, but so are the "companies" that created each one. For instance, Hudson Soft surrogate Tomato shares an affinity for shooters and hides its logo in each of its games as a collectable. Likewise, one of the titles on display proudly wears its ramen product placement on its sleeve!

The carts themselves are lighthearted fun and not terribly deep, but RGC is truly a collection that's more than the sum of its parts. What really makes it memorable is being drawn back into the world of CRT TVs, outlandish schoolyard secrets, magazines that were equal parts strategy and advertisement and a gaming buddy who audibly cheers and jeers your efforts as you play. It received a sequel (see Page 53), but sadly, it remains Japan-only largely due to the underwhelming sales of this underappreciated original! **– MATTHEW T.**



MORE GAMES!!

PLATFORMER

HENRY HATSWORTH IN THE PUZZLING ADVENTURE

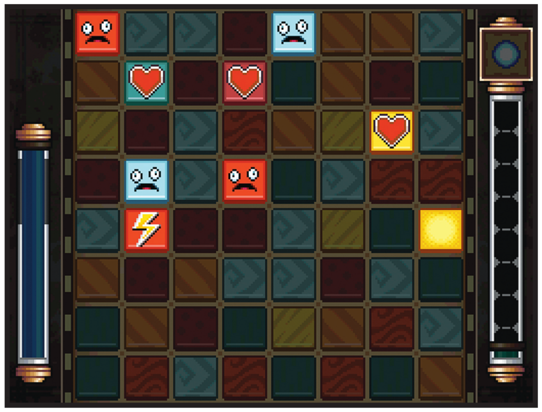
THERE ARE A few games for each system I own that I always recommend, and Henry Hatsworth is definitely recommended for DS – but also in general! Mashing a platformer up with a puzzle game sounds like a recipe for a hot mess, but when developers take care to make both elements excellent and wrap them in an intriguing package, great gaming experiences are born.

Admittedly, not many video games star well-dressed British adventurers, but here we are. Mr. Hatsworth is out to assemble the Gentlemen's Suit, which he's heard allows its wearer to control the Puzzle Realm. Several other elderly gentlemen also seek the suit, and Henry must battle them to continue adventuring, or to lay claim to the suit parts they found first.

The platforming element takes players to the jungle, underwater, the sky and more. The suit pieces unlock moves for Henry, so the game gets easier to navigate as the adventure goes on. The true magic takes place as soon as Henry defeats an enemy, as it's then thrown into the Puzzle Realm – a parallel universe that is infringing on the real world because of the quest for the Gentlemen's Suit.

Once the enemy is in the Realm, it can be defeated permanently by matching it against similarly colored blocks. The puzzle element is a lot like Tetris Attack/Panel de Pon. Both worlds are synchronous and affect each other, and it can get overwhelming fast. Failing to clear enemies in the Puzzle Realm means they may come back into the real world and attack Henry again. Playing the puzzle also fills up an energy meter that can make Henry young again, or give him his Robot Suit (allowing him to ride an invincible mech), alleviating some of the chaos.

The game's outlandish premise bleeds into the story with hilarious effect, and the dialogue between the well-designed characters and the sheer insanity of it all are delightful. I highly urge you to try out this amazing anomaly, as it's a mash-up experience like no other! **– BRETT**



PUZZLE

PUZZLE

PROFESSOR LAYTON VS. PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY

YOU KNOW, searching for evidence in the Ace Attorney series reminds me of a puzzle I once heard . . .

Though Phoenix Wright first took the stand on Game Boy Advance, both he and Professor Layton achieved worldwide fame on Nintendo DS. Similarities were drawn between the two, thanks in part to their not entirely dissimilar storytelling styles and puzzle solving.

In the case of Ace Attorney, progression followed a visual novel adventure style in which players are tasked with visiting a crime scene to look for clues and question witnesses. With statements and evidence in hand, things proceed to the courtroom, where Mr. Wright would use what he's gathered (and his wits) to prove his client's innocence.

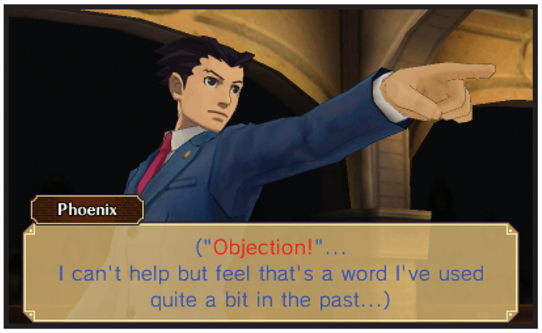
The good Professor's adventures followed a similar track, albeit without the courtroom antics. And rather than just the "pixel hunts" that are commonplace in Ace Attorney, Layton instead challenged players with puzzles of a different sort: mazes, sliding block, logic, math and other tests of their mental acumen.

Professor Layton and Phoenix Wright come from very different worlds (figuratively speaking), but Professor Layton *vs.* Phoenix Wright manages to place the two on more neutral ground. Both heroes and their respective assistants find themselves in the medieval world of Labyrinthia, where they must work together to prove the innocence of a woman named Espella Cantabella, lest she be sentenced to execution by the Witch's Court.

While in Labyrinthia, Professor Layton tends to handle more of the "Adventure" portions, navigating different environments, talking to townsfolk and other people, and solving brainteasers, all in the service of acquiring clues to aid in the other portion: the "Witch Trials."

During Witch Trials, Phoenix Wright steps up and cross-examines witnesses to gain further evidence and details needed to protect his client. Different from the normal Ace Attorney trials, however, are the "mob trials," wherein multiple witnesses must be cross-examined at once. Fortunately, this ace attorney has another ace up his sleeve, as he can also use the same Hint Coins that Professor Layton employs to help figure out how he should proceed with the case.

It was a crossover for the ages. Now if only either of their currently dormant series would get a new sequel! **— DAVID**



VISUAL NOVEL

ACTION

BATTLE CHEF BRIGADE

PEANUT BUTTER & CHOCOLATE? How about Dragon Steak Curry, served with a Taka Berry medley and Cheepchi Horn scramble? Battle Chef Brigade, which was released for the Switch in 2017, has the last premise that you'd think a platform brawler and a Match-3 puzzle would be linked together with: epic cooking contests! How's that for mixing genres up?

Mina Han is a young woman who works at her family's restaurant in the Windy Village countryside with dreams of joining Victusia's elite Battle Chef Brigade: a group of chefs/monster hunters who serve the people of Victusia by slaying dangerous beasts and preparing epic feasts. Against her parents' wishes, she travels to the capital city and joins that year's aspiring class of Brigadiers, where the students are pitted against each other in one-on-one duels to winnow out the best and brightest. Like the classic cooking competition show Iron Chef (Chairman Kamin is obviously Chairman Kaga's brother from another mother), the chefs need to incorporate a specific ingredient in their meal, as well as match their judges' preferred flavor profile: Earth (green), Water (blue), Fire (red) or a combination of up to all three.

Then, it's time for the monster slaying to begin! Each battle has different areas where monsters congregate, such as dark caverns with bubbling lava, or the Skylands with its gusting winds and steep drops. Some monsters — like Slimes or Cheepchi — are easy pickings, but going up against a Dragon or Hydra while unprepared can be pretty dangerous. Mina is able to cast wind magic and throw knives; Thrash wields a sword and can fuel his berserker rage by eating dropped ingredients; and Ziggy can summon undead minions to assist in all the hunting and gathering. Keep in mind that you're against the clock, so once you've got a goodly haul, it's time to get back to the kitchen . . .

. . . and get into some Match-3 puzzle action! Each ingredient is composed of Taste Gems, which will combine and level up if you stir three of the same color together vertically or horizontally. In order to please the judges' palates and potentially win the battle, you need to use at least one of the themed ingredient (or just part of it, if it's monster-based cuisine), as well as have a majority of Level 3 Taste Gems in the color(s) requested left on your playing field. However, watch out for impurities — like bones, cracked Taste Gems or blobs of dangerous poison! Between battles, your part-time job proceeds can purchase new cookware (like slow cookers and improved cooking pans), additional combat skills and even cookbooks that will add a bonus to the judge's scores for meeting challenges, like using every part of a monster or going completely vegetarian. **— REBECCA**

PUZZLE

PLATFORMER

YOKU'S ISLAND EXPRESS

MIXING UP PINBALL with platformers is nothing new. Games like Kirby's Pinball Land, Sonic Spinball and Metroid Prime Pinball all took elements from platformers and incorporated them into their pinball games, but the one thing they all had in common is that they were, first and foremost, pinball games. This one takes a very different approach.

Yoku's Island Express is both a platformer and a pinball game, 50/50, and its implementation is genius. You control the titular Yoku, who is a dung beetle. Instead of rolling around a ball of, well, dung, you play through the game tethered to a grey sphere. As you begin, you arrive on a tropical island and are immediately greeted by the former post-master, who informs you that you have inherited his job, which is to deliver mail all across a beautiful interconnected world – and maybe awaken some ancient gods and save the island in the process.

The thing is, Yoku can't really jump, and that's where the brilliant pinball mechanic comes into play. All around you'll find brightly colored pinball flippers embedded in the game world, which you can control. If you need to get up to a high ledge, find a flipper and launch that orb you're pushing around into the air. That alone would make for an interesting blend of pinball mechanics in a platformer, but it actually goes much deeper than that. Literally!

Along your travels, you'll also frequently encounter small tunnels that you can crawl into. These will take you to areas that resemble pinball tables, but aren't actually separated from the rest of the world in any way. Your control over Yoku doesn't change, but since, like in a real pinball table, there isn't much of a flat surface to walk on, your focus becomes hitting the ball with the flippers instead of pushing it with Yoku.

These areas also introduce all sorts of pinball mainstays like bumpers and targets, which reward you with fruit. The more fruit you collect, the more areas you can unlock, and so forth.

Like all the best genre-blending games out there, Yoku gets it right by making both parts of its identity fantastic on their own. If this was just a cute puzzle platformer about Yoku pushing his ball around delivering mail, it still would have been a pretty great game. If it was just a series of the pinball segments tied together, that would have been good too. But meshing both of these expertly crafted playstyles together so seamlessly into one cohesive experience is really something to behold. Add to that the beautiful visuals, charming world and catchy music, and you can see why Yoku's Island Express has the sterling reputation that it does. It's simultaneously one of the best platformers and best pinball games on the Switch! **– KRIS**

PINBALL

Several decades deep into the history of the video game industry, we've seen strict genres fully establish themselves with well-defined boundaries. It's easy to point out the greatest works in any of those categories too – the best JRPGs of all time have been decided through years of debate; everyone's aware of the top Metroidvanias.

But the industry seems to now be shifting. We're getting more and more peanut butter & chocolate in our diet these days – seeing more and more innovative game designs that push beyond those old boundaries by breaking down the walls separating two previously delineated territories and exploring the overlap between them. It's an exciting time!

So, what comes next? A combination of survival horror and falling block puzzlers? A visual novel battle royale with 100 players (or readers)? A monster-catching JRPG in which you have to beat each creature in a dance battle to add it to your team?

. . . Wait, these are great ideas. I should talk to some devs about these . . .

REST O

the sitcom starring a final boss and an obnoxious '90s video game mascot

by LLK

BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

HYRULE WARRIORS: AGE OF CALAMITY

The war before Breath of the Wild.

WE ALREADY KNOW how it ends.

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild told a tale of tragedy. It began with "Open your eyes." And Link did. And he found himself waking up in a stasis chamber, having spent an entire century asleep and recovering from a grievous injury he'd suffered in a cataclysmic war. When he emerged from that cave and gazed out across the expanse of the land of Hyrule, he saw only ruins. He saw his own failure. He saw loss – the loss of his princess, the loss of his fellow Champions . . . but he didn't realize all of that at first. Because of one more thing he'd lost: his memories of all those events.

Breath of the Wild's tragic tale wasn't told all at once. Rather, as Link explored the remains of a kingdom that had once been so familiar to him, he regained his lost memories one by one, slowly piecing back together the story of what had gone so wrong; what had transpired to result in him being sealed away in that healing chamber for 100 years in the first place. As players, we learned the truth at the same pace: Link, Zelda and the entire united fighting force of the many different peoples of Hyrule had gone to way against the evil armies of Ganon – and they had lost. Horribly. Terribly. They were defeated so badly that, 100 years later, the land was still mostly in shambles.

Now, we get to lose those same battles ourselves.

Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity is an all-new Hyrule Warriors sequel that is also a canon storyline prequel to The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. It turns back the clock to 100 years before the moment that Link opened his eyes in the ruined future, and directly tells the story of the war against Calamity Ganon and his hordes of fearsome monsters. We already know how it ends – officially. But it's our job to nonetheless fight back against that future, stepping into the shoes of the valiant soldier Link when he's in his prime, fighting his hardest to protect the realm of his king.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO, KOEI TECMO & OMEGA FORCE RELEASE: NOVEMBER 20, 2020 RATING: T

NOT YET OVER A CENTURY OLD LINK

Over 100 years before he became the lonely wilderness explorer of Breath of the Wild, this Link was the standout soldier in the army of the King of Hyrule. His reputation as the kingdom's greatest warrior was already firmly established, as was his role as the most prominent and powerful protector of the princess.

Versatility is the name of the game with Link. As in the previous Hyrule Warriors games, he's like several different playable characters in one, as his moveset totally changes depending on which weapon you've given him to wield. A common combo of sword and shield is standard for him, or you can give him a two-handed blade, or a spear, or a sledge-hammer . . . or a soup spoon! He'll expertly use each one to overcome the odds, then chow down on some of his own cooking to recharge.

THE CHAMPIONS ASSEMBLE

But Link won't be alone.

For nearly three and a half decades now, the Legend of Zelda brand has largely been the Legend of Link – in that Link (in various different forms) has almost always been the sole playable character in every sequel and spin-off. But when Hyrule Warriors arrived in 2014, it single-handedly undid those decades of singular focus in one fell swoop. Dozens of different characters pulled from several past Zelda adventures were all given their playable debuts – many of them on Day 1, and the cast only increased further through the updates and re-releases that followed.

Age of Calamity is thankfully doing the same. While Breath of the Wild was another solo quest, this tale told in the same world opens the flood-gates and finally lets us take command of the supporting cast – particularly the Champions! Daruk, Revali, Urbosa and Mipha were major players in the plot of Breath of the Wild, but were only really active in cutscenes. Each one died in this great war (again, we already know things end badly for them), but before that fate befalls them, we'll get to become them.

EVERYONE'S A WARRIOR

And being the Champions is just the beginning! Again, the earlier Hyrule Warriors adventures already set the precedent that anyone and everyone can become a playable fighter capable of totally destroying entire armies all on their own. (I mean, come on – if Agatha the bug-obsessed girl from Twilight Princess can save the world with an umbrella, anything goes.) So we should be prepared to see lots of non-combatants set their lack of bat-tlefield experience aside and wade into the fray.

Like Zelda! The Breath of the Wild version of Princess Zelda is the least physically capable take on the charac-ter the series has arguably ever seen – to the point where Masahiro Sakurai rejected the idea of using her in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate even as he updated Link in that cast to match his Breath of the Wild self. The Hyrule Warriors developers have no such res-ervations about her capability to kick butt, though, so she'll also be playable for the first time here, courageously charging into fights while wielding only a simple Sheikah Slate! (Who needs traditional weapons when you can whack foes with metal boxes?)

THE CAST EXPANDS FURTHER

Beyond just the characters we already met in Breath of the Wild, Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity will take full advantage of its placement on the timeline and introduce us to several new faces . . . or, perhaps more accu-rately, several old faces back when they were younger.

Breath of the Wild had a lot of old folks. Really, the aging process must work a little differently in the magical land of Hyrule, because plenty of char-acters who lived through the great war 100 years earlier are still around when Link wakes up a century later – in fact, I think *every* character who didn't fall in battle back then managed to then go on to survive the interven-ing 10 decades? Nobody just passed away of natural causes while Link was sleeping. That's courteous of them.

Anywho! Age of Calamity is giving us Young Impa. She was an elderly sage in Breath of the Wild, but in this game she's a spry, shy ninja girl in her teenage years. Her fellow old Sheikah, Robbie? He's here, looking like Doc Brown and obsessing over the science of the Guardians. And his research partner/Impa's sister, Purah? She actually looks older this time, since the botched experiment that turned her into a child hasn't happened yet!

TWIN IDENTITIES
ZELDA

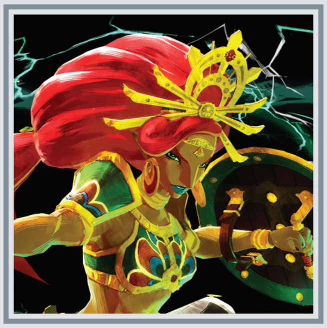
While this Zelda has never been known to dress up in ninja gear and start calling herself Sheik, she nonetheless still has two different identities she'll juggle in this appearance, as before in Breath of the Wild. Primarily, she'll be a scientist who relies on her Sheikah Slate to do her fighting for her; its array of Runes can be called upon to perform a variety of functions (with each one being much more combat-focused than before). She can tap into Cryonis to cause blocks of ice to assail her adversaries, summon a huge walking bomb that spits out smaller explosives or even deal damage by taking pictures with the Camera Rune!

Her second identity, though? That of a magical maiden, wielding mighty spells of light! She struggled to tap into that power in Breath of the Wild, but that's how she's pictured in this game's key art, so it's a safe bet we'll see that Zelda in battle too.

AERIAL ARCHER
REVALI

Bold, brash and never without his bow, Revali is the fighter to choose if you want to soar above the chaos and rain down destruction from the sky.

I'm quite interested to see just how the development team decides to adapt the abilities of this archer of the air to the ground-focused formula of Warriors gameplay. In all likelihood Revali will just function like all of the rest of the playable characters, racing along the ground to get from place to place and making his foes meet up with arrows to the face. But since he's a member of the winged Rito people and can fly at will, I hope we get some kind of aerial combat scenario at some point in the story! Maybe he could take to the sky and have a dogfight with a group of Skywatchers, the helicopter-hovering variety of Guardians that were so tricky for landlocked Link to take down back in Breath of the Wild?



FURIOUS FIGHTER
URBOSA

This is the moment so many fans have been waiting for: playable Urbosa! She's appeared at the top of many Zelda fans' Smash cast wishlists, since joining that crossover roster was one way she could have made her controllable debut. But this Hyrule Warriors starring role looks like it'll be even better than that!

In Breath of the Wild, Link gained the ability "Urbosa's Fury" after conquering the dungeon of Vah Naboris in the Gerudo Desert; it was a massive explosion of lightning he could use to fry almost any enemy in the game. Here in Age of Calamity, we get to see why that ability came from Urbosa: She's a master of all things electricity! She has a unique meter that keeps track of her electrical charge, and when it's full she's able to discharge more volts than a Level 100 Pikachu in a thunderstorm. Better run, bad guys! The storm's coming.

There are many, many more where they came from: King Rhoam, before he became the ghostly "Old Man" of the Great Plateau; enemies like the Yiga Clan and their leader, Master Kohga (or is that just a passed-down title?); and probably even Baby Sidon. Everybody loves Baby Sidon. I will flip my lid if he's playable in chibi kid form – running around the battlefield with some tiny little spear! (I'm crossing my fingers.)

THE PB&C OF IT ALL

OK, I'll break myself free from talking about the cast of characters, because we have other business to address! Let's talk about the peanut butter & chocolate that's in play here.

Now, admittedly, Hyrule Warriors is not as clear-cut of an example of genre-mashing as those games we just finished featuring in the preceding pages; this spin-off series was born more out of a concept of applying a Legend of Zelda coat of paint to classic Dynasty Warriors gameplay. But even if it's to a lesser degree than obvious category collisions like ActRaiser, I'm going to allow Age of Calamity into this conversation since it's endeavoring to blend together the marks of a traditional Musou with the unique qualities of open-world Zelda.

"Open-world Zelda" is not fully established as its own ongoing thing quite yet, but it's the genre I'd assign to Breath of the Wild, if anything – Zelda games have found their own identity over the decades, and Breath of the Wild was Eiji Aonuma's attempt to break free of the series' standard formula and make things almost fully non-linear. If its upcoming sequel continues that aim, and then other future sequels also prioritize go-anywhere exploration, "open-world Zelda" will be more well defined over time.

Meanwhile, everyone knows what a Musou is by now. The genre that the Dynasty Warriors brand created for itself, it's defined by frantic, flashy, hack-and-slash combat against huge numbers of enemies. The marketers at Koei Tecmo like to call it the "1 vs. 1,000" series, as each game makes you feel like an ultimate, unstoppable conqueror as you carve through dozens, even hundreds of foes in seconds flat – and then hundreds more spawn in to replace them and you do it all again. The vast majority of enemies in these games are pure cannon fodder, falling to single, over-the-top attacks accented by explosive visual effects.

Age of Calamity pushes these two puzzle pieces together with panache.

PROUD PROTECTOR
DARUK

Champion of the Goron race, bearer of the best beard in the land and absolute unit in comparison to any kind of company he keeps, Daruk is here to bring a brutal beatdown to any foe foolish enough to cross his path.

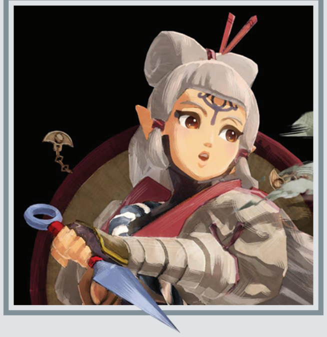
He'll be the third playable Goron in the overall history of the Zelda franchise, as he'll follow in the footsteps of Darunia from the earlier Hyrule Warriors games, as well as Link himself, who transformed into Goron form in Majora's Mask. That means Age of Calamity's developers will need to get a bit more creative to make him feel distinct – and they may do so by emphasizing Daruk's defense. The power he passed along in Breath of the Wild, after all, was "Daruk's Protection" – it absorbed all incoming attacks while activated. Perhaps Daruk will walk straight into the entire armies here, and be fully unfazed by their assaults?

WATER WIELDER
MIPHA

Likewise, we've had a pair of playable Zora characters before with Zora Link in Majora's Mask and Hyrule Warriors' Ruto, but Mipha looks poised to wash all memory of those predecessors away with the way she'll be wielding water. Like the most talented waterbenders from the Avatar: The Last Airbender franchise, Mipha will have the ability to summon and swirl columns of water around her, then slam them into her enemies. It's always high tide when she's around!

What's more, her precision with a spear is unparalleled, so any enemies not dragged away by the current will simply be pierced and punctured.

Mipha's fighting skills may end up being secondary to her storyline role, though – Breath of the Wild revealed a romantic attraction between her and Link. There must be more to that story, and this is where we'll see it play out.



CUTESY KUNOICHI
IMPA

Finally (for now – we know there will be plenty more playable characters than just these seven), we have the matriarch of the Sheikah tribe . . . several decades before she assumes that role! At this point in the timeline, Impa hardly resembles the tiny old woman she'll one day become. Rather, she looks much more like Paya from Breath of the Wild – and plays more like a character from Naruto!

Yes, like the #1 ninja himself, Impa dashes across the battlefield with her arms trailing behind her, performs hand signs before attacking with ninjutsu skills, can clone herself several times to multiply her power and even summons giant frogs to help her out on occasion! She's an all-new Impa that is radically different from the naginata-wielding warrior we met in the older Hyrule Warriors titles – but that's not a bad thing! She looks like she'll be a ton of fun!

COOL CARTOGRAPHY

The map is where the blend comes together. The first Hyrule Warriors just had players pick each stage to play from a normal menu screen, and then the playable battlefields were inspired by old Zelda games, but all clearly Warriors stages under the hood. Here, a more perfect union has been pioneered: The Breath of the Wild world map is back, and it pulls double duty.

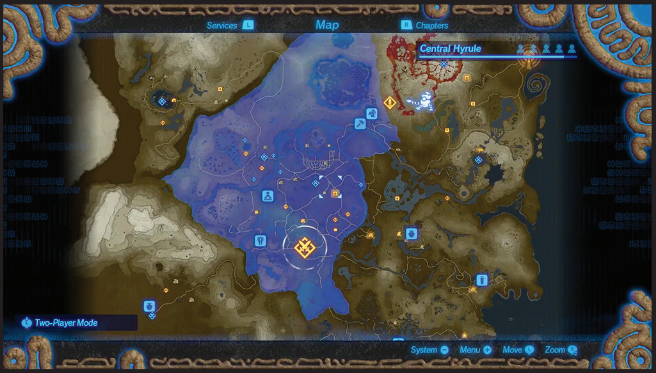
Its first job is taking over the role of the old menu screen. Now, you'll select the site of your next skirmish by looking over the whole lay of the land, like an old army general with a cloth map of enemy territory unfurled on a wooden table in a tent. A variety of icons spread across the expanse, and different activities will be triggered when you select them. Some will take you into storyline-advancing main missions. Others will give you small sidequests to complete, like gathering a particular set of ingredients to cook a recipe. These low-key moments will provide a welcome respite from the fast pace of the primary action.

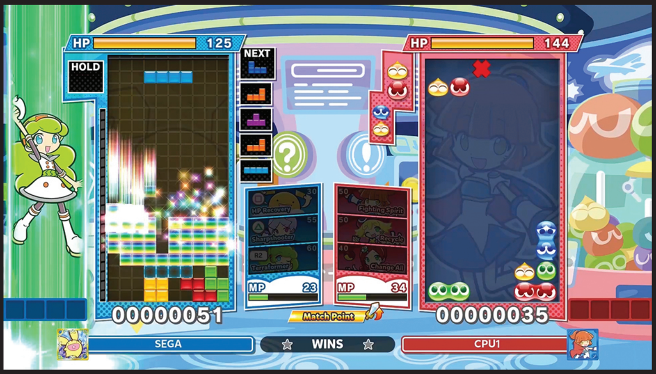
Once you do leap back into battle, though, you'll see the second way the Breath of the Wild overworld map is key to setting this sequel apart from the previous Hyrule Warriors: the land has been precisely preserved! The actual geography so many of us fully explored before is back, and battles will take place in all those old ruined spaces . . . before they became ruins! So many places in Breath of the Wild were full of crumbling stonework, scorched cabins and the like – now we'll be able to see what this world looked like before it was destroyed, while actively fighting to prevent that destruction from taking place!

RESPECTING THE TIMELINE

Finally, it can't be overstated how cool – and unexpected – it is that Nintendo is allowing this game to be a canon storyline prequel. Telling a continuous tale across multiple Zelda games has never been a priority for the company – the fans had to cobble together the series' timeline for decades before they finally came forward with their official version. Now it seems like the fan desire for a grander narrative is being respected, and Breath of the Wild will ultimately be the centerpiece of a trilogy!

Of course, this is still a Hyrule Warriors game, so I wouldn't be surprised if some non-canon nonsense pops up at some point, like playable Tingle again. Since we know the main story ends badly, we might need a little levity like that! **– LUCAS**





PUYO PUYO TETRIS 2

Sega serves up a second helping of mean beans! (With blocks.)

WHEN I FIRST got my Japanese PlayStation Vita copy of Puyo Puyo Tetris, I didn't know what to expect, other than a Tetris & Dr. Mario-type merge of the two playstyles. I never expected to see Puyos and Tetriminos in the same play field, and actually have it work! The game was slowly translated and disseminated to multiple platforms, including the Switch. Its new sequel, Puyo Puyo Tetris 2, will hit all platforms all at once, and it looks to expand on every success the original had.

This version boasts a new adventure story, with a return of Ringo and Tee facing a new evil that is mixing Puyo and Tetrimino. The look is the same as the last game, with bouncy anime characters interacting with one another. A world map takes players to challenges and battles that level up their characters like an RPG. More EXP nets more abilities and item cards that can turn the tide in battle or make challenges easier. Branches on the world map can lead to new characters for your party of three, and forming a formidable team is imperative for quest completion. Questing, in a puzzle game? This game doesn't just mix two classic falling block puzzle games, it's trying to blend in the role-playing genre too!

Several puzzlers have used versus matches to simulate battles, complete with HP bars and special moves, but I'm excited to see how a party system can alter gameplay. Once characters are discovered in Adventure mode, they'll be available in all modes.

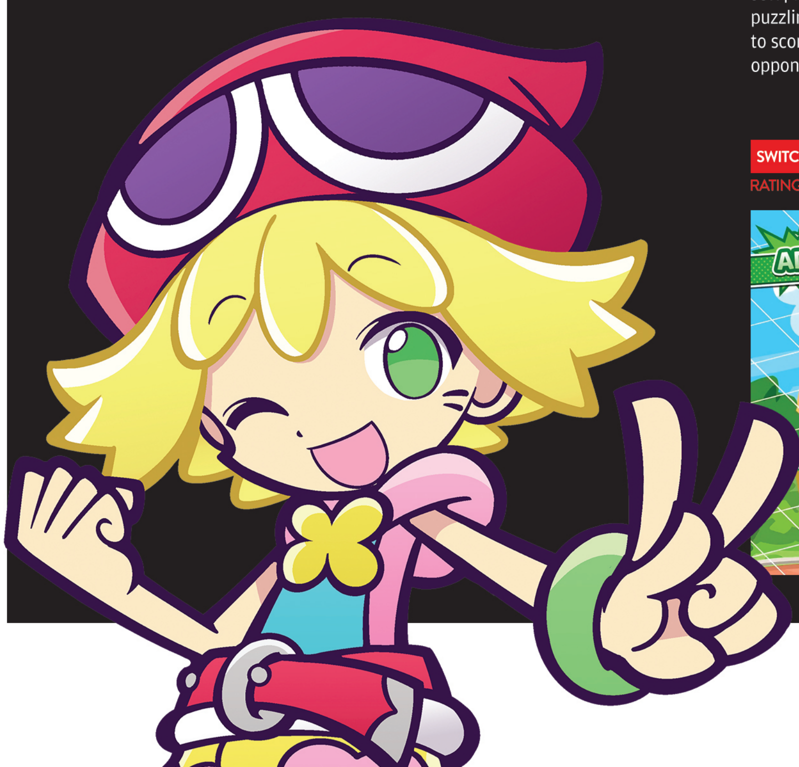
All modes from the first game will return for this sequel. Standard Versus mode has players pick their puzzle type and send garbage to each other to defeat the other player. Swap mode has players play both styles, with random swaps between the two fields. You can set up a huge line clear, only to swap into Puyo mode and have to react fast to remember your combo setup! Big Bang mode requires fast puzzling, as players have just a minute to score points that will damage their opponent after that time runs out.

Fusion mode is the zaniest of all, mixing Puyos and Tetriminos in the same play field with wild results. It has to be played to be believed! Challenge mode is the single-player mode for each puzzle style, for practice and for fun. Party mode seems to have been converted to Skill Battle, where items and abilities are used, but that's not fully confirmed quite yet.

There were some online issues that the first game experienced on various platforms, and Sega boasts improvement for the sequel. Because of the vast experimentation in the first game, this game should be more balanced between Puyo Puyo vs. Tetris battles. Some say that a fast Tetris player will always beat a Puyo player. Others argue the opposite, but several tweaks to the last game's foundation should make this a more polished effort.

Get ready for the battle of blobs vs. blocks to begin again! **— BRETT**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASE: DECEMBER 8, 2020
RATING: E10+



SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD + BOWSER'S FURY

The cat's finally out of the bag . . . but it isn't a Deluxe edition after all?

SCENARIO 1 WON.

. . . Or maybe Scenario 2. Depends how speedy your personal post office was at the beginning of September, really.

We sent NF #48 off to be printed without official confirmation that this game actually existed – just strong rumors that its reveal was imminent. And so it was that the announcement finally arrived on September 3, right smack in the middle of when many of you were probably getting your copies of the physical version of the issue delivered. If your delivery was slow, you got to read our speculation about "Super Mario 3D World Deluxe" after parts of it were already proven to be inaccurate. If it was fast, you got to dream alongside us about possibilities like playable Waluigi for a brief span of time . . . before those hopes were dashed.

Well, OK, it's still possible that the mightiest waaaaahrrior of them all is secretly lurking in this Switch port, but it seems less likely now that its final name has been revealed: Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury. There's no Deluxe there. And, at first glance, it looks like there may not be much – or any – content added to the main game at all, much to our dismay. Rather, that use of the plus sign suggests the core adventure may stay mostly untouched, while any extra content is relegated to the separate, standalone "Bowser's Fury" experience.

So, what could *that* be? There are a few possibilities. It could be an extra chapter like Xenoblade Chronicles: Future Connected – an extension of the story that takes place after the original ending. It could be a pack of super difficult challenge stages meant to appeal to expert players; Nintendo's gone that route a time or two in the past. It could be a mode that kicks the heroes to the curb and makes Bowser playable, perhaps telling the tale of how he first came to kidnap the Sprixies and gained use of the Cat Suit power-up to become Meowser!

Nintendo's going to keep us in the dark a little longer on the details. But we'll know more soon! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: FEBRUARY 12, 2021 RATING: E

GAME & WATCH: SUPER MARIO BROS.

Nintendo revives the Game & Watch product line for a special release!

G&W PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: NOVEMBER 13, 2020 RATING: E

BACK IN 1980, when the Game & Watch product line was first released, Nintendo wasn't Nintendo just yet – or at least not the Nintendo we know today. It was before the NES allowed them to break into the mass market; when their gaming momentum, in part, started with a simple monochrome mascot and a rudimentary handheld game that tasked players with juggling balls back and forth.

Although most companies would consider older products mere relics, Nintendo likes to celebrate their history on occasion. The legacy of Game & Watch is prevalent even today, with numerous references through various minigames and a full-on character homage in Super Smash Bros. The company even re-released a true Game & Watch unit through their now-defunct Club Nintendo service in the early 2010s. Now, in 2020, the brand is back again!

Continuing the celebration of the 35th anniversary of Super Mario Bros., Nintendo is reissuing that original 8-bit classic once again – now in the form of a standalone Game & Watch handheld. What's more, this new Game & Watch features both Super Mario Bros. and its direct sequel, The Lost Levels (a.k.a. Japan's SMB2), as well as an extra variation of Ball (the juggling game) for good measure. Here's the thing, though: It's also going to sport some classic Nintendo surprises!

The publisher has explained that the device will come with "35 little touches to discover." Now these seem to be Easter eggs based on the clock app (that's the "Watch" part of the Game & Watch), but the fact that it comes with three games *and* extras is enough to push it over the edge in direct comparison to most Game & Watch handhelds of the past.

Nintendo's also stated that the device will have an LCD screen, a USB connector and a rechargeable battery. Its layout mirrors a classic NES controller, with the nostalgic cross D-Pad and two main face buttons (B & A), as well as "Game," "Time" and "Pause/Set" buttons. It weighs 2.4 ounces and will run for around eight hours on one charge (with charges clocking in at three and a half hours each).

Obviously, the main attraction is the idea of another dedicated device to play those two aforementioned retro classics. It's a smart move to include both, as the original Mario is something you can just run and re-run endlessly due to the timeless nature of its level design.

While Lost Levels isn't as iconic, it also isn't a slouch in the platforming department. Plus, I'm sure a lot of prospective players likely haven't touched Lost Levels yet, so they'll be able to dive headfirst into a brand-new experience alongside some comfort food.

Finally, this is going to be a limited-release item. So if you don't get it this year, you might have to rely on the secondhand market! **– CHRIS**

NEW POKÉMON SNAP

How will it set itself apart from its decades-old predecessor?

IT TOOK OVER 20 long years, but Nintendo finally answered fans' pleas and announced a new Pokémon Snap game for Switch. Since it was officially unveiled earlier this year, the Big N has shared very few details about this long-awaited follow-up – but we can glean some hints as to what we can expect from the game from the brief footage and info we've been offered thus far.

Perhaps the biggest hint comes from the title itself. Rather than appending a 2 to the name, Nintendo has chosen to call this sequel *New* Pokémon Snap. We've seen the company employ this same naming convention plenty of times in the past – most notably with the New Super Mario Bros. series and even Yoshi's New Island for the 3DS – which suggests the upcoming game will stick very close to the original Pokémon Snap in terms of gameplay and atmosphere.

But that's not to say there won't be anything new in New. Since the original Pokémon Snap was released, Nintendo and Game Freak have introduced hundreds of additional Pocket Monsters to the famous franchise's ever-expanding bestiary, and we've already seen many of these new 'mons make an appearance in New Snap's world. From Primarina swimming in crystal clear waters to colorful kaleidoscopes of Vivillon flapping through the air, it looks like there will be no shortage of Pokémon to catch – on film – in New Pokémon Snap.

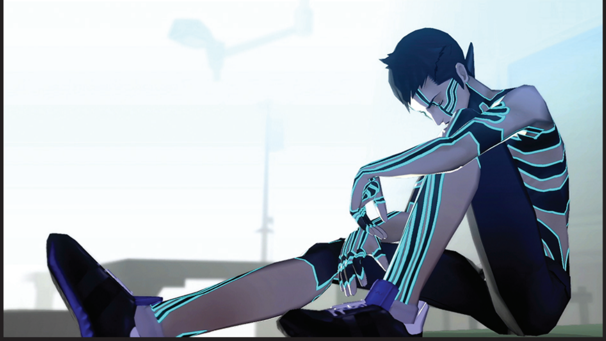
Like the N64 original, it appears the new Switch game will also be a largely on-rails experience. In the debut trailer, we could see the player character riding in what looks like a souped-up version of the ZERO-ONE, Todd's vehicle from the original title. Interestingly, however, it seems the new vehicle runs not on a wooden track, but rather a holographic one, which materializes out in front of it when you begin your expedition. Does this mean there will be multiple pathways to take through each level as you photograph Pokémon? It certainly seems that way.

It appears there may be some new environments to explore as well. While that debut trailer focused primarily on a sandy beach and its surrounding plains and forest (the same type of environment that served as the starting area in the original game), Nintendo promises that there will be "unknown islands to discover" in this title. What these could be remains a mystery, but the original Pokémon Snap took players down jungle rapids, around scorching volcanoes and through dark caves, and it seems like a good bet we'll get to explore similar locales in this Switch sequel as well.

Beyond that, New Pokémon Snap looks very much like a modernized take on the original game. As in the original, your primary goal is to photograph Pokémon in their natural habitat, and to do that, you'll need to lure the Pocket Monsters out of hiding by throwing apples. It's unclear if Pester Balls will return as well, but even with just apples in your arsenal, the Big N teases that you'll be able to coax Pokémon into displaying "behaviors and expressions you've never seen before."

There are still many lingering questions here, but we're already hopeful that New Pokémon Snap will recapture the N64 original's charm! **– KEVIN K.**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: BANDAI NAMCO
RELEASE: TBA RATING: RP



SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI III: NOCTURNE – HD REMASTER

Pulled from its PlayStation past and placed on the Switch.

PICTURE THIS, if you can: It's the end of the world as we know it. Society is in ruins, a demon plague has spread across your city and a powerful, shadowy cult is set on bringing about the end of the world. (Sure, it's an unbelievable setting, but games are weird!)

An HD encore of an iconic PlayStation 2 JRPG, Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne – HD Remaster takes place in a post-apocalyptic version of Tokyo that is slowly dying. It's your job to hunt down demons, either to battle with them or recruit them to your cause, with a mechanic not unlike Pokémon. Together, you and your forlorn allies will try to stop Conception, a cataclysmic event that will finish off an already very broken world and doom everyone still left alive.

The game is both unashamedly Japanese and very much a product of its time. Originally released in 2003, Nocturne feels like the video game equivalent of an angsty emo boy band, right down to the floppy-haired party members you'll pick up along the way.

While it isn't for everyone, those who have nostalgia for the turn of the century – or those who enjoy a game that proudly wears every possible JRPG trope on its sleeve – might find that Nocturne scratches an itch they'd forgotten they had.

Perhaps aware that the SMT series has never been as popular in the West as in Japan, developer Atlus has gone all-out with this remaster in an effort to appeal to English speakers. For the first time, the game will feature full English language voice acting – although players can select the original Japanese voices if they prefer.

If you're in the mood for cutesy escapism or an upbeat power fantasy, this might not be for you. If, on the other hand, you feel like crawling into a hole and getting nice and sad, this could offer a catharsis that you won't find elsewhere. **– MATTHEW L.**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: ATLUS RELEASE: SPRING 2021 RATING: M

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI V

Currently on schedule to arrive next year.

THIS IS IT: the game that JRPG fans have been waiting for. Shin Megami Tensei V, the latest installment in the hit post-apocalyptic role-playing series, is nearly here.

Originally teased way back in January 2017 as part of early reveal information for the Switch, this new SMT sequel has been enjoying a slow and careful development process – as should be expected, considering the high-water mark set by other games in the series.

In the West, Shin Megami Tensei games are nowhere near as popular as their spin-off series, Persona. Fans of those high school monster-fighting simulators might be a little disappointed by the absence of a social system in Shin Megami Tensei, as this series sticks to a more traditional JRPG formula.

That said, these games do have their own unique twist on dungeon-crawling. Past titles in the series have explored different elements of capturing and raising demons, and according to Atlus, this installment will build upon those previous experiments. If you've ever wanted a virtual pet that looks like a skeletal matador, you're going to get along with Shin Megami Tensei V just fine.

This being a story-rich RPG, Atlus is being tight-lipped when it comes to story. A cinematic trailer has shown off both a modern day and post-apocalyptic Tokyo, but beyond that, there are still a lot of unanswered questions as to how this title will factor into the wider SMT mythos.

Considering that no actual gameplay footage has been seen yet, it might be too soon to predict what kind of beast this game will turn out to be. At this point, the Shin Megami Tensei name is strong enough to make existing fans excited either way, but newcomers might want to remain cautiously optimistic until we actually see the new game in action.

Luckily, as Shin Megami Tensei V is scheduled for release sometime in 2021, it probably won't be too long before we get to see just that! **– MATTHEW L.**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: ATLUS RELEASE: TBA 2021 RATING: M

ACTION PLATFORMER | FARMING SIMULATION

SAKUNA: OF RICE AND RUIN

It doesn't get more divided than this.

BEFORE NINTENDO SWEPT in with the announcement of Age of Calamity, this game was leading the pack of possibilities vying for this issue's cover position. Why? Because we'd already decided we wanted to do "Peanut Butter & Chocolate" as our theme, and Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin is the perfect embodiment of that idea!

This is a night-and-day genre clash that exceeds any other example we've offered in this issue in terms of how striking the contrast between the two styles of play is — it's a wild juxtaposition of combat conducted at a breakneck pace and rice farming that's so tranquil it might very well put you to sleep. How did Sakuna's adventure end up being so torn between two extremes? It all started with her parents.

Sakuna, our protagonist, is a young celestial princess. Her mother is Lady Toyohana, the harvest goddess. Her father is Lord Takeribi, the warrior god. So when they see that their daughter is turning out to be a spoiled brat who doesn't appreciate either heritage, they come up with a plan of punishment that will force her to live up to both of their legacies.

She's banished to the inhospitable Isle of Demons! Also known as Hinoe Island, it's a territory that exists near the border of the heavens and the earth. Sakuna's parents once lived there, but they — and all other gods and humans — abandoned it long ago, leaving it to become infested with demonic forces and unnatural wildlife. Sakuna's job is to battle back against these evil animals, wiping them out with the warrior skills inherited from her father. Then, once a foothold is established and some of the island is safe once again, she's further charged to tap into the traits of her mother and begin to cultivate the land by growing crops of rice.

It's a brilliant story setup, as it somehow makes the unwieldy collision of action platformer and farming sim seem like a perfectly normal pairing! And the blending only gets better and more thoughtful the further you go, as the developers have come up with unique ways to cross-pollinate the two styles of play.

The one that first caught our eye a year ago and informed our first preview article is the fact that Sakuna doesn't fight with swords or shields or other standard soldier gear — rather, she goes demon hunting with the same gardening tools she uses in her farming work. They're not quite as nonsensical as weapons as, say, Shovel Knight's choice of blade, but it's still a striking visual to see a little girl slashing at a giant frog with a hoe.

More recently, we've learned of the critical importance of the farming sequences: The quality of the rice crops you produce directly affects Sakuna's battle abilties. Because she's the daughter of a harvest goddess, her very spirit resonates with the plant life that she has a hand in raising. If you're able to make truly tasty, high-quality rice, Sakuna will be strengthened; if you botch the job, you'll have a harder road ahead fighting further demons, since her power will be diminished.

The Rice side of the Of Rice and Ruin experience seems to mostly play out in a series of minigames, each one dedicated to a different part of the real-world process of raising rice crops: planting, tilling, sorting, threshing. If done well, these activities should offer a feeling of zen (much more so than the hard work of actually doing any of those things in real life).

The Ruin side, on the other hand, should make you sweat with how fast and frantic it is! Before this game, this same development team made an absolutely bonkers bullet-filled shoot-'em-up called Astebreed, so the insane speed of dashing around bashing foes, setting up combos and flying around the battlefield like Spider-Man using Sakuna's divine raiment might actually be a touch more calm than that was. We'll get to see very soon! — **LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: MARVELOUS (XSEED) DEVELOPER: EDELWEISS
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 10, 2020 RATING: T

KINGDOM HEARTS: MELODY OF MEMORY

Combat with a beat.

KINGDOM HEARTS IS an institution. It's more than a franchise at this point – it's a *haven* for franchises. Whenever a Disney or Square Enix property is born, a large collective of the gaming industry shouts "So when is it getting the Kingdom Hearts treatment?" For nearly 20 years I've waited with anticipation before every Kingdom Hearts release to see if a childhood favorite film would be a part of its world, and it never gets old. Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory might be a spin-off, but it looks like it's still going to uphold that same sense of wonder that the series is so good at producing time and time again.

Due out in November on Switch, Melody of Memory is a rhythm game in a long line of Square Enix rhythm games. Square is no stranger to Final Fantasy or Dragon Quest musical spin-offs, and now Kingdom Hearts is entering that harmonious pantheon with a game of its own. The gist is that you'll ride down a track with a party of various Kingdom Hearts (and thus, Disney) characters, hitting notes for points; much like Harmonix's 2003 classic Amplitude.

Amazingly, series director Tetsuya Nomura is not only involved with Melody of Memory, he's writing the story and heading up this iteration with co-director Masanobu Suzui. Nomura recently commented that while Square Enix set out to make another Theatrhythm, he felt like it "already established its final form," and decided that he wanted to explore a game that merged Theatrhythm's sensibilities with his pride and joy: Kingdom Hearts.

Nomura is also responsible for injecting story elements into Melody of Memory, with Kairi serving as a "storyteller." According to him, it will "follow the story from the first installment . . . up to the most recent title of Kingdom Hearts III . . . then slightly beyond that." Are there any wild franchise Easter eggs waiting to be uncovered? Possibly! If you're worried about Nomura pulling his usual tricks, he says that there won't be a "true ending" or DLC for Melody of Memory. That could always change, of course!

I'm really curious about the "beyond" myself, given Nomura's recent musing of what could come next for the series, stating, "Right now, we are in the process of discussing our future plans within Square Enix and with Disney and nothing has been set in stone, but I do have some concepts percolating in my head."

Whatever the case might be, with options for both cooperative and competitive play on top of the story and free play, it sounds like Melody of Memory is going to last us quite a while. On Switch, you can even play locally with up to seven other people in an exclusive "free-for-all mode." Coupled with the "one more song" nature of playing portably in bed, the Switch looks like the best place to enjoy the game.

Hopefully this spin-off lives up to the series' name – but given Square Enix's track record with rhythm titles, it's probably a safe bet! **– CHRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: NOVEMBER 13, 2020 RATING: E10+

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

RETRO

BLASTING MR. STEVENSON

GUMSHOE
NES, 1986

At first glance, this looks like just another scene from a run-of-the-mill 8-bit platformer . . . but there's no platform under that hero! Will he plummet to his doom? Fear not! You just need to shoot him! Yes, that's the bulletproof Mr. Stevenson, the protagonist of what could be considered Nintendo's first genre mash-up game, Gumshoe. It was one half sidescrolling platformer and one half light gun game, as you couldn't control the daring detective directly; rather, you'd shoot him with the NES Zapper when he approached an obstacle or abyss to trigger him to leap over it. You could also target enemies in his path and blast them out of his way – and you had to, because he'd constantly walk forward regardless of any encroaching danger! Gumshoe itself has been lost to time and will likely never make another appearance, but its fusion of two of the different styles of early NES games played a major role in influencing a third genre of gaming: endless runners! **— LUCAS**

LEFT IN THE PAST
THE GUARDIAN LEGEND

A trailblazing genre mash-up that's been left stranded on the NES!

COMPILE MAY NOT have the brand recognition of Activision or Capcom, but chances are you've at least encountered some of their work before. Their biggest claim to fame is probably the Puyo Puyo franchise, but puzzle games aren't their only specialty.

Before closing down in 2003, Compile also had a reputation for making some top-notch shooters! Legendary titles like Zanac for NES, M.U.S.H.A. for Sega Genesis and Blazing Lazers for TurboGrafx-16 all share Compile DNA, as does an interesting game for MSX computers called Guardic.

Unlike other contemporaries in the genre, Guardic didn't auto-scroll through stages. Instead, it worked on a room-by-room basis, similar to dungeons in The Legend of Zelda. Your ship was confined to one single-screen stage at a time until all enemies were defeated. Once the room was clear, you would fly to the next room, repeating the process until your game was over.

Guardic was a high score-driven, arcade-style experience that didn't feature much of a narrative, but its adventure game-inspired room-by-room structure made it stand out. So when it came time to create a sequel, Compile more fully embraced that concept, creating one of the finest genre benders on the NES: The Guardian Legend.

Released in Japan as Guardic Gaiden, The Guardian Legend landed in the U.S. in April 1989. This time, instead of attempting to incorporate adventure elements directly into the shooter gameplay, the two genres were given their own separate segments to play out in, allowing each one to grow into a more fully realized experience.

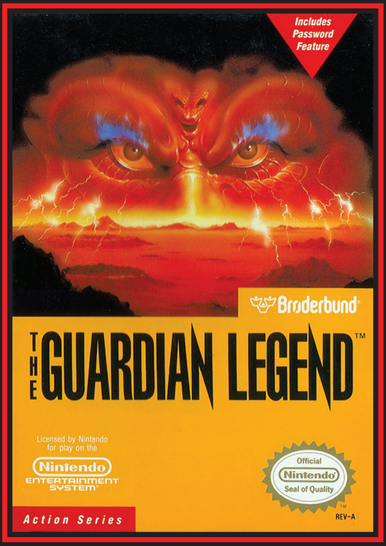
You begin with a vertical scrolling shooter segment, soaring through the stars as a spaceship, blasting asteroids and enemies alike. But upon defeating the stage's boss, instead of flying to the next area, the scene suddenly cuts to what looks and plays like a completely different game! In an instant, the music shifts from high-flying action to moody and mysterious, and you now control a cybernetic woman in a mostly empty room. A computer recording tells you that you're effectively standing in the remains of a destroyed civilization. The details are vague but intriguing, and once you leave, you're presented with a sprawling labyrinth filled with destructible blocks, deadly monsters and strange portals locked behind different symbols. What started as a standard shooter is now a sci-fi spectacle!

The power-up system isn't as intricate as what you'd find in a Zelda game, with simple enhancements to your blaster and different types of disposable weapons acting as your only real upgrades. Instead of finding items like the Hookshot, your objective is to locate different keys to get you into a series of corridors. Finding and entering these areas is what bridges the game's two distinct playstyles.

As you open your first corridor gate, you discover that this woman you're controlling isn't just the pilot of that ship from the intro level – she *is* the ship! She soars through the sky, awesomely transforming into the spacecraft, and the next shooter segment begins.

That's the basic gameplay loop of The Guardian Legend, and it continues for a surprisingly long time – if it's your first go it can take upwards of four hours to complete. It does get a bit repetitive, but it more than makes up for it with its fantastic sense of mystery, top-notch visuals and extraordinary soundtrack.

Mashing up two genres to this extent wasn't a common practice back in 1989, and the fact that both styles wound up being good enough to stand on their own is incredibly impressive. Compile may not be around anymore, but their Guardian Legend will never die! **– KRIS**



ORIGINAL RELEASE: NES, APRIL 1989
PUBLISHER: IREM (JAPAN), BRØDERBUND (NORTH AMERICA), NINTENDO (EUROPE)
DEVELOPER: COMPILE

PLAYING IT TODAY

Over three decades later, The Guardian Legend is still stranded in the 8-bit era. That means your best bet for playing it legitimately is tracking down an original NES cartridge – and it seems like there are plenty of those floating around on eBay and probably in a local game shop near you as well. There *may* be a chance that it could pop back into the spotlight via Nintendo Switch Online's NES game array or a future console's equivalent service, because Nintendo actually served as the publisher for its European release. But, so far, it's been a no-show there.

ALTERNATE ART

Speaking of Nintendo's European release of the game, it seems like their hope 30 years ago may have been to make the Guardian, Miria, into another gun-toting, robo-armored leading lady like Metroid's Samus Aran. At least that's the vibe this alternate cover artwork gives off, don't you think? It's kind of an off-model mismatch to how she actually appears in the game (she struts around in red swimwear, heavy shoulderpads and boots there), but this take does look like a woman who can shapeshift into a spaceship!

ORIGINAL RELEASE:
NINTENDO DS, FEBRUARY 26, 2009
PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO
DEVELOPER: INDIESZERO

PLAYING IT TODAY

Since Nintendo's DS line was not region-locked, nothing's stopping you from importing a copy of the original cartridge from Japan and firing it up today . . . other than the language barrier. Happily, while no official localization ever materialized, a fan translation was published back in 2014! With a little know-how gained from key Google searches, you could play a close-enough "Retro Game Challenge 2!"

ARINO'S SHOW

While we're on the subject of Game Center CX, we have to take this opportunity to recommend that you check out the original show too! As with its tie-in video games, efforts to bring it to American audiences officially have been scattered and hit-or-miss. But it's been airing continuously in Japan ever since it got started way back in 2003! The show is a joy. Shinya Arino, the star, subjects himself to playing classic video games from start to finish and chronicles his successes (or more often, his struggles) along the way. It's hilarious to watch him fail, and uplifting when he finally succeeds! Seek it out!

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION GAME CENTER CX: ARINO NO CHOUSENJOU 2

Why oh why did we never get the second Retro Game Challenge?!

BACK IN 2009, YouTube was still in its infancy. No one knew what a Let's Play was. Retro music and fashion were cool, but in gaming, the concept was a niche inside another niche. Perhaps worst of all, cute little pixel art indie games were almost totally ignored! Needless to say, it was not the right time for Game Center CX 2 – one of the best games ever to grace a Nintendo console – to make its mark. That's a terrible shame, because it's a timeless classic that has a massive audience just waiting to discover it!

Developed by indieszero, the studio that would later make the Theatrhythm Final Fantasy and Nintendo's own NES Remix franchises, Game Center CX 2 is the unlocalized sequel to Retro Game Challenge (profiled on Page 35). It includes four abridged or remixed games from the original (Haggleman, Rally King, Star Prince and Cosmic Gate) plus eight all-new games to take in. Unlike the original, which was focused mostly on NES-style games, Game Center CX 2 expands that virtual library to include unofficial releases for the SNES, MSX, Game Boy, Game Boy Color and even the Game & Watch. Just about every genre of game is covered as well, from brawler to text adventure. It's a love letter to an entire era of games.

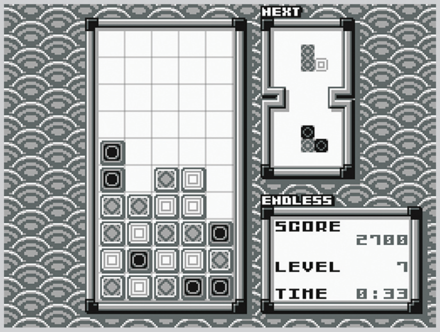
My favorite of the bunch is definitely Mutekiken Kung Fu, a single-plane beat-'em-up that's one of the best-looking and -playing games in the genre. It's a genuinely beautiful game, with silky smooth animations and simple-but-realistic character designs. Battling forward against an army of ninjas, fire breathers, dragon heads and brown bears, nothing will stop you on your quest to air-combo the snot out of a teleporting Shogun. Then, just for goofs, you can take on the CPU in two-player Vs. Mode.

Another standout game here is Demon Returns, the Mario-meets-Ghosts 'N Goblins mascot platformer. It's followed up by Super Demon Returns, its sparkling 16-bit sequel. There's also a Pokémon-meets-Dragon Quest RPG called Guadia Quest Saga, which really sucked me in, even with my limited understanding of Japanese. Other parts of the game, like the text-based Detective Kacho, are completely unplayable without use of a translation guide or FAQ.

For the most part, though, all the games here are fully enjoyable without knowing the language. Wiz-Man, a cross between Gauntlet and Pac-Man; Gun Duel, a blazing-hot shmup; Training School – Kugure! Girijan MAX, a platformer-practice program; and Triotos, a familiar-yet-original puzzle game, are all easy to pick up without the need to read a single word. That last one is another one of my favorites in this collection, taking the best elements of falling block and Match-3 puzzlers. It's so good that, like Demon Returns, it's available here in both 8-bit and 16-bit iterations. And it was later ported to the real-life iTunes app store!

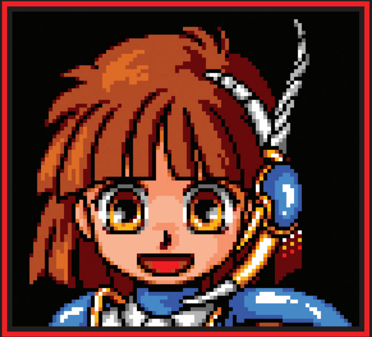
That's what I wish would happen for all these games – I think they'd all do great if ported out as standalone purchases, preferably on Switch. While you only have to play each one of Game Center CX 2's main games for 20 minutes or so to unlock the next in the library, they are all relatively large and content-rich, and could easily stand toe-to-toe with many $3-$5 Switch eShop titles. Even better would be to relaunch the full game on Nintendo's latest console with some celebrity Let's Players doing the voices. (Arin "Egoraptor" Hanson immediately comes to mind. In fact, all they'd have to do is drop the "O" from Arino's name and presto change-o, instant localization!)

Maybe Yacht Club Games could help make that happen? I know you're reading this, Yacht Club! If you're up for it, please respond! **– JONATHAN**



CHARACTER PROFILE
ARLE NADJA

The peppy protagonist of the Puyo Puyo puzzle series . . . who got her start in a dungeon crawler franchise?!



FIRST APPEARANCE
MADOU MONOGATARI 1-2-3
(MSX2, 1990)

CAREER HIGHS

At the tender age of 6, Arle managed to scale a tower filled with evil monsters and defeat the final boss – which was her *kindergarten graduation exam.*

'90

After meeting her best friend Carbuncle, Arle shifted her attention to using her spells to clear screens of colorful Puyos and defeat various monsters and opponents.

'92

Arle had this to say to a potential suitor as she ventured through a forest in search of the golden runes stolen and scattered by the Dark Prince. (Apply cold water to burn.)

'01

Arle and her partner Carbuncle might have been trapped in dungeons fighting monsters forever, if the staff of Compile hadn't thought of adding them and their friends to a little puzzle game called Puyo Puyo they released on the MSX and Famicom Disk System in the early '90s.

'20

Despite their earliest games not making it out of Japan, they're one of puzzle gaming's most recognizable partnerships – and they'll be back in the spotlight again in December thanks to Puyo Puyo Tetris 2!

CAREER LOWS

'90

Unfortunately, she attracted some unwanted attention from someone who'd continue to bother her for years to come: the Dark Prince.

'93

However, Carbuncle would be the only original Puyo Puyo character to make the series' first leap West, in Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine.

'17

Arle and Amitie's reunion with their friend Ringo is spoiled when Tetriminos start invading the world of Puyo Puyo!

HIGHLIGHTS

PUYO PUYO 2
SUPER FAMICOM, 1995

Much like Street Fighter II, the sequel outdid its predecessor and became one of Japan's most popular arcade titles. It set the rules and mechanics for sequels to come, and is now playable on Switch via a Sega Ages port and the free selection of SNES titles offered to NSO subscribers.

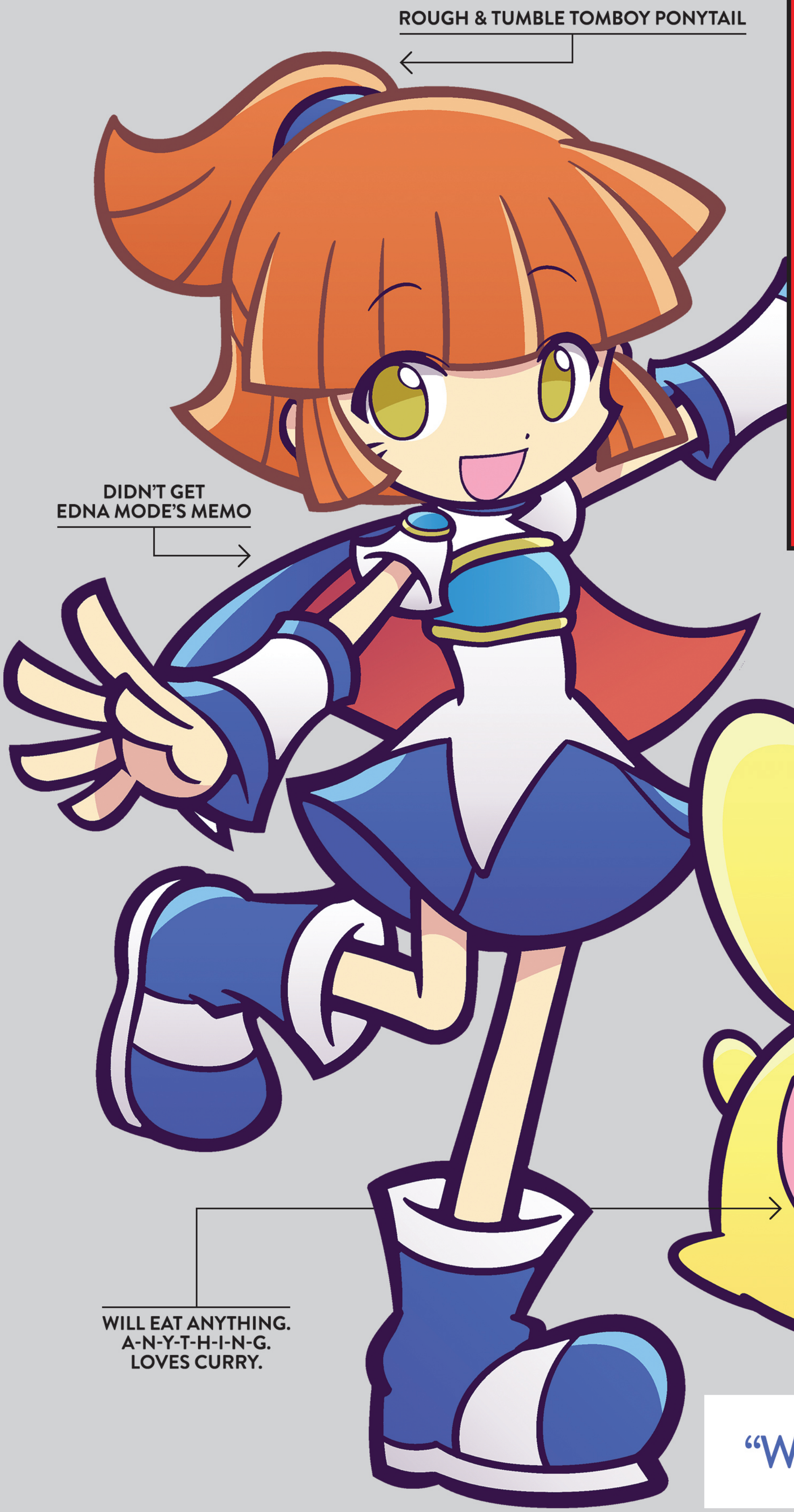
PUYO POP FEVER
GAMECUBE, 2004

Amitie, a student at Primp Town's magic school (and pictured back on the bottom of Page 43), encounters Arle while on a quest to find her teacher's magic wand. This sequel implemented the Fever mechanic, which puts a bunch of chains on the screen – ready for a single Puyo to start a score explosion!

PUYO PUYO TETRIS
SWITCH, 2017

You got Puyo Puyo in my Tetris! You got Tetris in my Puyo Puyo! That's the new Fusion mode in a nutshell, and Arle and her friends must master it to stop the universes of blocks and blobs from merging. As the current, active successor to the long-running Puyo Puyo series (and Madou Monogatari before that), Puyo Puyo Tetris has also updated all the classic characters!

BY REBECCA RUDRANATH



PLAYING HER DEBUT TODAY

ORIGIN IN ENGLISH

Originally released for the MSX2 computer (the system where Metal Gear also got its start), Madou Monogatari 1-2-3 got several ports to other consoles – including the Game Gear, and those particular ports have been fan-translated to English! The series has battles like typical JRPGs, but you'll have to go by text descriptions of your health and damage output. (By the way, if you were wondering what the 1-2-3 refers to, it's a reference to the Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet software. I don't get it either.)

- PUYO PUYO TETRIS

"We did it, Carby!" "Gu gu!"

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

IT'S KOMBAT TIME in the 78th issue of Nintendo Power from November 1995, with Mortal Kombat 3's Lin Kuei cyber-ninja Cyrax taking the cover. Joining him on Super NES were Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety, Big Sky Trooper, Boogerman (who shared poster time with Donkey Kong Country 2) and Zoop, while Killer Instinct arrived on Game Boy alongside Super Star Wars: Return of the Jedi and a Super Game Boy Classics two-pack featuring Midway's legendary Defender and Joust. Naturally, there was new 32-bit love for Virtual Boy with Virtual League Baseball and Waterworld (which was marginally better received than the movie it was based on).

The Sports Scene brought glimpses of EA's NBA Live '96, Madden '96, NHL '96, FIFA '96 (notice a trend here?), International Superstar Soccer Deluxe from Konami, JVC's Emmitt Smith Football and one question looming over them all: Would Tecmo Super Bowl III: The Final Edition indeed be the final Tecmo Bowl game? (The answer is no.)

Epic Center cast a spell on Final Fantasy fans around the world with screens of SquareSoft's work on Silicon Graphics workstations, featuring characters from Final Fantasy III/VI rendered in 3D polygons — and fueling speculation about a Final Fantasy 64 that never was for years to come. (Instead, the company would part ways with Nintendo and go on to *only* make Final Fantasy VII.) But before that, they provided Epic Center with plenty of other material from Super Mario RPG, Secret of Evermore and Chrono Trigger. Nintendo also shared some online fun with a glimpse of Wizard's Realm, a freeform RPG hosted by Nintendo Power Source on America Online.

Elsewhere, NP celebrated the 10th anniversary of the NES launch and looked at what R.O.B. had been up to since. In addition, they set up the Player's Poll to award a lucky winner with both the SNES and arcade versions of WWF WrestleMania: The Arcade Game, which was also featured in Pak Watch alongside Mega Man X3 and the best game to come out for the Virtual Boy, VB Wario Land, as well as Nester's Funky Bowling and the news that some game called "GoldenEye" was being moved to the Ultra 64.

December's cover for Issue #79 spotlighted Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest, and joining Diddy and Dixie on SNES were Waterworld (sharing poster space with Earthworm Jim 2), PTO II, MechWarrior 3050, WWF WrestleMania: The Arcade Game and Urban Strike. Game Boy got Vegas Stakes and Mortal Kombat 3, while Virtual Boy was highlighted with an exclusive review of Virtual Boy Wario Land. (Once again, VB's best.)

Elsewhere, we got a peek at the return of Earthworm Jim and a Killer Instinct "Stamps for Champs" competition to win discount stamps for the Super Power Supplies catalogue. Epic Center featured more Evermore, Tactics Ogre and Super Mario RPG, plus some Civilization strats. The Sports Scene covered NBA Give 'n Go, Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball and NFL Quarterback Club '96.

The Player's Poll winner got a Donkey Kong Country 2-inspired trip to Six Flags, plus the game itself. Finally, Pak Watch closed things out with Revolution X, Final Fight 3, Toy Story and still more Waterworld. Oh, and Super Power Club subscribers got a set of DKC2 cards in the back, too! **— DAVID**

ISSUE #78: **NOVEMBER 1995**

ISSUE #79: **DECEMBER 1995**

NINTENDO 64 ARRIVES IN JAPAN

While DKC2 claimed the December cover, the real headliner was the Nintendo Ultra 64! "The ultimate video game system in the universe" had been seen before, but the real news was the debut of its revolutionary controller and games at the Shoshinkai expo in Japan. A dozen games were planned to be playable, but then-Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi ultimately pulled 10, leaving only Super Mario 64 and "Kirby Bowl 64."

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
June 21, 1990, in a cul-de-sac not unlike the one seen in Ed, Edd n Eddy

FAVORITE FOOD
Japanese curry

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS
I can vibrate my eyes on command!

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Voiceover Artist (and Professional Sassmaster)

BEST KNOWN FOR
Voicing Revali, Teba and the Great Deku Tree (The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild); Subaru Natsuki (Re:Zero); Rean Schwarzer (The Legend of Heroes: Trail of Cold Steel); and Mishima Yuuki (Persona 5 & Persona 5 Royal)!

SEAN CHIPLOCK

Meet the versatile voice actor who brings to life the likes of Revali and Rean Schwarzer!

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

SEAN: Revali's Q&A is now ready!

NF: How did you get into voice acting?
I have Adult Swim and Neopets to thank for lighting the spiritual fire that served as my introduction to the world of VO. I would often stay up quite late on school nights in order to take care of "dailies" on my account, and a series of advertisements on one particular evening led to me checking out Adult Swim's website for reasons even I'm not entirely sure about. During my time there, I ended up seeing a preview clip for an upcoming episode of an anime that was being broadcast on Adult Swim each week, and a "side bar video" related to this clip actually showed Troy Baker in the studio recording part of that clip live for his role as Abel Nightroad. Seeing the actor speak at the same time another camera was showing the anime character's lips moving was the "2 and 2 together" moment that made me understand where these voices came from, and even though I didn't yet fully understand the process, I knew instantly that I wanted to know more and become a part of that process as soon as possible.

Did you have any favorite game and cartoon character performances growing up, and if so, how do you feel about them now that you've got years of experience behind the mic yourself?
Not many people bring up Jade Cocoon 2 when talking about favorite childhood games, but it was a really good example of a game that showed all kinds of different character personality types and mannerisms. For a PS2-era game it had a *substantial* amount of voiced lines, and every hunter type in the game had their own distinct sound! The performances did tend to be campy at times, but that fit well within the atmosphere of the game, and a lot of those characters have served as inspirations for my auditions when I come across descriptions that are similar to what I heard back then. Mega Man Legends falls into this area as well, as Corey Seiver remains one of my favorite vocal iterations of the titular character I've heard so far, while all of the Bonnes have their unique moments and monologues. For animation, I practically grew up on the Newgrounds website both before and *after* I began being really involved with voiceover, so there are countless flash animations and parody series I can rattle off as inspirations: LegendaryFrog, "Play Another Day," TANKMEN, Weebl and Bob, Egoraptor's old "Awesome" series and so many others.

The real core of all this is that whether it's a serious project or a silly one, passion from the actor or creator tends to be a defining factor on whether it's memorable for good reasons. A lot of my best performances come out when I'm having lots of fun while being in the booth, and I draw a lot of inspiration from parroting or adapting other performances I hear that I find "fun" as well.

What are some of the most common misconceptions about your work that you run into when talking about what you do, and how do you usually go about clearing them up?
The industry is a lot smaller than most people think it is, and the reason for that is twofold: first, because the number of "hubs" for a lot of studio-level projects is *far* smaller than the number of states or cities; and second, because the voiceover industry itself is still a *business*, and even though voice actors are not actual employees of the companies they work for they can still consider the engineers, directors and fellow actors they will often work with as "colleagues." What this means is that just being talented vocally is often not enough long-term (unless you are INSANELY vocally unique and in-demand) — you also have to be someone that others *want* to work with. The easier you can make the jobs of everyone else working with your audio, the more marketable and preferable you will be whenever a job comes along that you might be a good fit for. There will definitely be those gigs where you have a voiceprint that nobody else can match, but in most cases where there are multiple equally viable options to choose from for a character, the final decision will often come down to who the director recognizes and trusts to be consistent, efficient and trustworthy.

Also, voice acting is not *nearly* as much about "doing crazy voices" as people like to think. In fact, you can probably name at least a few actors who you seem to hear over and over and over again who also tend to voice the same types of characters (or have a very recognizable voice). What really matters more is giving life to characters through a voice and performance that the audience can connect with and believe in. Using Revali as an example, he didn't need to be flamboyant to the point of comedy in order to get the point across that he was confident in himself and suspicious of of Link; mere consistency in his attitude is enough to send that message over the course of the memories and the game as a whole.

OK, let's talk about Revali! How did you prepare for the role of Breath of the Wild's enigmatic birdman — a character who's gone on to become an icon in his own right?
What's honestly ironic is that all the preparation I did for Revali actually worked *against* me at first. I had this solid, committed choice in my head regarding who he is and how he conducts himself, which ended up not being completely aligned with how Nintendo wanted to approach the character in English, even though it was a viable choice overall (my own headcanon ended up more closely resembling the approach taken for his Japanese performance). Having to scrap everything and start from square one to redevelop his personality was a huge source of stress, and I've admitted in the past that I was so worried about giving him a vocal performance I could be proud of that I broke down crying over the phone to my mentor during a session break on the first day.

In the end, it was a collaborative effort of trusting my director to guide me to where I needed to be, and in turn being trusted to take the reins once I had a better (and more authentic) understanding of the character. It not only fell in line with Nintendo's focus on achieving success as a team, but also served as a major learning moment in my professional career.

Hajime Wakai, Breath of the Wild's Sound Director, has gone on record saying that Revali is his favorite character in the game. What do you think it is about him that resonates with people so strongly?
I wasn't aware of this beforehand, so whether or not that preference included my own performance of the character, I am equally proud to have been entrusted with representing him!

Funnily enough, I think the reason why so many folks find Revali memorable is the same whether they love *or* hate him. Out of all the Champions, he is the only one to exhibit at least a little suspicion and resistance when it comes to a complete stranger being put in place as their superior without any real prior accolades to speak of. The same dismissive attitude that sets him apart from the others is also one of the most genuine responses I think most of us would lean toward if we were put in a similar position. Of course, coming to terms with that can be uncomfortable, so it's no surprise that many view him as "disrupting the peace" of what is supposed to be a fantasy world experience. But Revali is who he is and he is committed to that self expression, and the same confidence that can cause him to appear standoffish also lends itself to making him admirable and trustworthy.

Do you know any of the other actors in the cast of Breath of the Wild? If so, do you ever get together in character and create your own noncanonical Zelda adventures?
Joe Hernandez (Daruk/Yunobo) was actually my colleague for a while when I worked at Disney California Adventure, so it was pretty surreal having another shared gig with him outside of the game! Patricia Summersett (Zelda) was somebody I had previously crossed paths with at conventions, but that was the first time we became actual colleagues (and the panels we've shared since then have only strengthened that kinship). Amelia Gotham (Mipha) and I keep in touch fairly often even if we don't see each other too frequently, and Jamie Mortellaro (Sidon, and who also served as my director) is hands-down one of the most supportive and uplifting people I've come to know since moving out to California.

I think Elizabeth Maxwell (Urbosa/Riju) and Bill Rogers (King Rhoam) are the only folks who I haven't really been able to make a deeper connection with, but they're incredibly busy individuals so I don't mind that very much.

That being said, as much as we enjoy our involvement in the game and getting to share our love of the characters with those who support us, contractual obligations mean that there's no real legal way for us to do anything off-the-record as those characters. Part of being entrusted with their vocal representation means respecting the copyright owners, and while I can only speak for myself, I'm pretty confident none of us want to lock ourselves out of future potential roles as a result of doing unofficial stuff.

How secretive is Nintendo about releasing story details and other aspects of their scripts? Were you ever tempted to pull a Tom Holland and spill the beans about an unreleased plot point or other spoiler?
They codename their auditions and story concepts just like many other studios working on AAA projects, but

in my experience, once you've signed the legally binding nondisclosure documents they're very straightforward about explaining the actual project contents and other contextual info you might need to know. When working on Breath of the Wild it was very clear that the intent was to have an atmosphere of passion shared between the production staff and the talent, so genuine interest in learning more about the game world and associated lore was often positively received and responded to.

Regarding sharing that knowledge, though . . . I think Tom Holland has a special circumstance where he is so integral to and associated with his role as Spider-Man that leaking spoilers can be waved off as a "quirk" rather than a violation of contract. But that definitely doesn't apply when it comes to stuff like Nintendo and their IPs! We're talking about one of the biggest household names alongside Disney, and historically Nintendo has been a company very focused on the concept of "team effort" and collaborative success. Lone wolves spilling info unofficially or behaving as though they were the primary cause of a work's quality doesn't mesh with that culture, and while I doubt it's something Nintendo would instantly take someone to court over, it's nowhere near as difficult to simply decide not to work with that person anymore going forward. NDAs are serious business, and part of ensuring I have a chance at working with them again in the future includes not giving them any reason to see me as a detriment to their operations.

How does your process change when tackling larger, more extensive roles like Rean Schwarzer in the Trails of Cold Steel series, a character you have to return to multiple times over a span of several years? Are you able to find his voice again fairly easily each time, or is it difficult to get back into that same headspace?
In the case of Rean Schwarzer, I genuinely found myself growing alongside the character both in my understanding of and my confidence in his portrayal. Being relatively new to both the franchise and his character actually served me well in portraying him as younger, open-minded, but actively learning in Cold Steel I, and as he became more confident and educated in Cold Steel II, so too did I have a more firm understanding of his world and specifically his role in it. By Cold Steel III, I was the most certain I'd ever been of what he represents and how he relates to the other cast members, and in turn I have said that Cold Steel III is the "perfect middle" where I found my strengths for both the battles and main storylines/efforts.

A good performance is about finding ways to connect to the character authentically, as well as presenting them in a way that the audience can connect to as well. Sometimes even feeling out of place can actually lead to a more genuine performance, if you can find a way to take that nervousness and unfamiliarity and apply it to the struggles the character deals with themselves. But for those moments when I might start to drift a little too far away from the baseline, all it usually takes is a reference line or two to get me right back to where I need to be.

You're also big into streaming. What are some of the similarities and differences between entertaining an audience with a scripted performance for a game or cartoon versus spilling into unscripted banter on Twitch?
In my case, I don't really treat my Twitch streams as another "performance" for those who watch me; my original goal when starting it was to provide an opportunity for people to see me enjoying the kinds of games that interest me, and for us to experience unique or unexpected moments together and share in those memories as a group. A lot of my commentary during my own streams really just boils down to funny observations or "chill vibes" chatter with the occasional filler Q&A on the side, and especially during the pandemic it's been a way for me to connect with others socially (without having to leave the house) and provide something worth looking forward to in a time when it can be really hard to keep our daily routines intact.

Rumor has it that Netflix might be working with Nintendo on a Zelda series. If they do, and you're cast in the show, what kind of stories would you like to see told there? Would you want it to be more mature and serious, or would you prefer they keep it light and family friendly?
This might seem a weird analogy, but what immediately comes to mind is the old Timon & Pumbaa animated series that used to air on Disney Channel. That show had such an incredible mix of slice-of-life stories and almost Seinfeld-esque situations that worked so well with the main characters' personalities, and I feel like that same template would work so well with the Zelda franchise in general. Make one episode be about the Phonogram Man and the course of his life that led him to his obsession with the weather. Make another episode be about Young Link trying to explain he wants off the swing when his parents only hear him saying "hUP" and "HIYAH!" ("Higher!"). Have mini side stories and events that give us insight into what made the different Champions become the way they are and molded their outlooks on the world as well as their own roles. As many successful shows have . . . well, *shown* us in the past, it's entirely possible to mix serious themes and silly situations in a memorable way.

Orson Wells, legendary actor and director, made the switch to voice acting in his final years with the role of Unicron, the devilish planet-eating Transformer. While I imagine that it's a little harder for voice actors to make the jump in the opposite direction, I'm still curious, would you ever want to take on a live-action role?
There's a saying that the smart actor doesn't turn down work they're eligible for, and even though I haven't actively thought about live-action work, that doesn't mean I wouldn't be willing to try it. A better answer to give is simply that voiceover work has kept me busy enough – OFTEN enough – that I haven't really had the free time to begin with to even consider adding anything to my daily schedule between workshops and tryouts and on-site auditions (these Los Angeles commute times are insane!). For the moment, I'm perfectly content with being able to challenge myself by exploring all these different characters and worlds through VO, but I'll continue to keep my mind open in case a better opportunity arises in the future.

Do you have any advice for someone who wants to get into the industry?
Spend less time wondering about it, and more time going for it! Much like my own efforts in streaming, a lot more of your learning will happen by just getting involved and trying things out rather than asking "what if" and trying to make excuses as to why you shouldn't bother. Check out places like the Voice Acting Club to immerse yourself alongside other folks in your same position and/or level of experience, and utilize resources like the website iwanttobeavoiceactor.com to educate yourself as much as possible about the different aspects of the industry so you can tackle new challenges with a strong foundation of knowledge. It's not hard to find old projects that I participated in way back when I first started – and I can assure you there was a LOT of growing and improving involved over the years – so the best way to get better at doing it is to start doing it in the first place.

Are there any other Nintendo characters that you'd love to play?
eyes Ghirahim fervently

Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
It seems super cliché, but probably flight, or at least the ability to hover/float a limited distance above the ground. A lot of my most fun dreams are the ones where I'm able to glide across the ground, not unlike how people on hoverboards move in real life. Rather than it being about freedom of movement, there's just a sort of relaxing quality to the "tilt and move" method that I'd really enjoy being able to do consistently without the use of machines . . . especially given that we know machines were what contributed to Revali's untimely passing! NF

LAST MONTH'S SHOT

"Unsatisfied with the fish he had been catching recently, Link decided it was time to try a slightly bigger bait." –Sean C.

"SEAN C." IN NP

Here's a deep cut for you! As it turns out, Sean Chiplock's first-ever contribution to the world of Nintendo – and the Legend of Zelda brand in particular – was not voicing Revali! It was this prize-winning caption sent into Nintendo Power, describing Link's Cucco-lifting antics in Twilight Princess. "Sean C." was judged to have the funniest response out of "bazillions" of submissions. His reward? Printed proof in June 2007's NP #216 . . . and now here again in NF #49!

BY JONATHAN HOLMES

Video games are getting mashed up with tangible toys like never before with Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit!

KART RACING VIDEO GAME | TANGIBLE TOY CAR

Explore Your Floor
MARIO KART LIVE: HOME CIRCUIT

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: VELAN STUDIOS
RATING: E

I SHOULD REALLY vacuum more often.

Prepare to become more intimately acquainted with the conditions and consistency of your carpet than ever before – the newest Mario Kart sequel is here, and it gives you a toy's-eye view of your floor. Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit is a brilliant hybrid of video game action and real-world remote-controlled car racing. Its star is a Mario (or Luigi) toy car that has a camera built into it. As you drive it around, the camera streams live video footage to your Nintendo Switch system, instantly giving you the same kind of perspective on your home that Buzz, Woody and the rest of the Toy Story gang had in Andy's room – and having such an up-close look just a few inches up off the ground might clue you into, well, needing to vacuum.

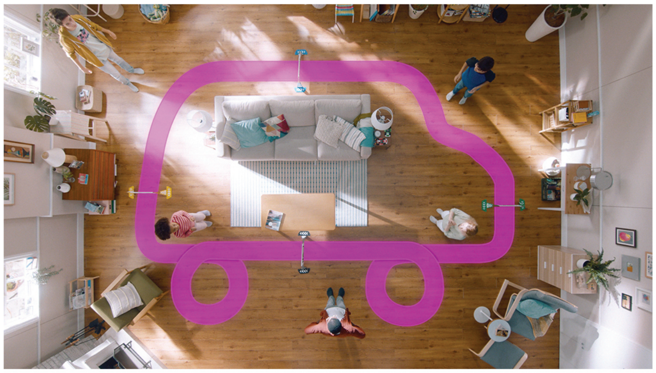
Really, before even getting into the video game side of things, this spycam Mario kart is a wonderfully entertaining little toy all on its own. My sons have been thrilled just to drive it around different rooms and see the video it streams back to the Switch; they've doubled over with laughter to see themselves appear on the screen when making funny faces or trying to cause the car to crash. It's hilarious!

But that's just the beginning. After having your fill of Explore Mode (that being the name of the mode that lets you just goof around driving the car wherever), you get into the full Home Circuit experience by setting up a Mario Kart racetrack in your home! You place four cardboard gates in whatever common or crazy configuration you wish. Then you choose "Create Course" in the Switch software and drive the car around one lap of the track you've laid down. AR technology taps into the camera's video feed and recognizes when one of the gates come into view; meanwhile, position-tracking data captured by the wheels fills in the gaps between the gates. When it's all said and down, you've got a magical map of your own custom-created course loaded in. Then, you're really ready to race!

The game offers the same set of racing options we've come to expect from the Mario Kart series, including a Time Trial mode and Grand Prix. And this is the real deal, too – it is a legit array of eight different Cups, each with three different courses to take on, and all of them boast brand-new track themes that I wouldn't have been surprised to see appear in a traditional Mario Kart 9. Several of them recycle elements from others and the physical layout of each one is the same, of course, unless you take the time to rearrange the gates between races, but still, it's much more robust than I would have predicted.

Why has there never been a retro World 1-1 racetrack in any of the past Mario Kart games? Home Circuit has one. And it's got a riff on Santa's workshop at the North Pole, and its own Rainbow Road. I'm impressed.

Really, the game software does a lot of heavy lifting to elevate the replay value of what is, in reality, just



you driving the same toy car around the same 10-foot space in your living room again and again. It really makes it feel like an earnest Mario Kart race by laying the different track themes over the video feed of your floor with more magical augmented reality tricks – and then the way the software interacts with the physical kart itself just further increases the immersion.

Four randomly selected Koopalings appear to oppose you when you go into a Grand Prix. They exist only on the Switch and/or TV screen, but the AR tech makes them look like they're really zooming around your house in person – and the illusion is really sold when they attack you. If your kart is struck by a Red Shell, for instance, a signal will be sent from the Switch to the toy car to tell it to stop moving for a moment. If you activate a speed-boosting Mushroom, then the little real-world kart actually does get a boost of extra speed. I mean, it sounds like simple stuff, I suppose. But all the technology working together to make it all happen in perfect sync is truly impressive!

. . . Though not every element ends up working quite as well as intended. There's a new function for the Chain Chomp item: It now latches on to the front of a racer's vehicle and yanks it in random, wild directions with a jerking motion. That just proved frustrating from a practical point of view, as I was trying my best not to ram this $100 toy car into my furniture and cause it to sustain actual damage – being forced off course in that way made me worry about my wallet. Similarly, the Bullet Bill item is meant to give you an easy way to get back into contention after falling back in the pack by putting the car on autopilot for a short burst with a ton of speed. But in my experience, it just ran Mario off the edge of the track any time I used it and caused him to run into a bookshelf or laundry basket. I'm sure this little car is durable enough to endure such abuse on occasion, but it triggered my "worried Dad" sense every time it smacked against something.

Still, that's my only real reservation with this wonderful innovation.

Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit has brought my sons more smiles than any other toy I've ever bought them. And it's inspired their creativity, as they've cheerfully picked up notebooks to sketch out new racetrack design ideas and then delighted in making those tracks a reality. The car is versatile and has performed well on a variety of surfaces we've tested it on, from laminate to hardwood to, as you know already, slightly uncared-for carpet. I'm looking forward to continuing to play with this unique Mario kart along with them – and even when the novelty of building tracks and running real races eventually wears off, it'll still be a nifty spycam car that will be fun to drive around for a laugh every once in a while. So bring those laughs to your home, too! (And keep your floors well vacuumed.) **— LUCAS**

9.5

The Fight to Find Fruit

PIKMIN 3 DELUXE

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E10+

SEVEN YEARS LATER, I've returned to PNF-404.

When Pikmin 3 Deluxe was first announced in August, I got excited. I loved the original back on the Wii U, and I couldn't wait to relive that grand adventure on the Switch!

. . . No, really. I actually couldn't wait. So I impatiently reattached my dormant Wii U console to my TV, found and retrieved my Pikmin 3 game disc from its dust-collecting storage spot in the depths of my laundry room and restarted the quest from scratch on a fresh save file. Did you know that seven years is a long enough time for memories to fade from a first play-through of a game? It's true! So it almost felt like a new experience again. And that's good news for fans looking to replay it on the Switch.

By the time that print copies of this NF issue arrive in subscribers' hands, the new Switch edition will already be on sale. But we're not going to dive into an evaluation of it just yet – rather, we're going to kick off a larger, more comprehensive review by using this space to revisit the Wii U original first. Let's remember together where this game began, and then we'll be set up well to more thoroughly render a verdict on the changes, additions and enhancements that Pikmin 3 Deluxe introduces.

Also, I just still really love this game a lot, so I want to write about it more!

Seven years later, returning to Pikmin 3 has been eye-openingly odd. The hardest thing to reacclimate myself to was the control scheme: a three-way workload split between one Wii Remote, a Nunchuk and the Wii U GamePad. There are also all-buttons and touchscreen-focused control options as well, but I figured with the Switch not supporting the Wiimote, I should give the game a go with that setup one last time.

I enjoyed it . . . for the most part. Again, it was odd in a way I didn't fully recall. With lots of critical functionality assigned to the GamePad touchscreen, you have to awkwardly have it lying at the ready next to you or on your lap until you need it, and then take one of your hands off the primary controllers to be able to do things like issue auto-walking orders to one of your three captains. I wonder if Deluxe will feel more streamlined and less disjointed when I sit down with it next.

Also odd about the motion-sensing Wii U controls: the motion sensing not always working quite right. The input to tell your whole squad of active Pikmin to charge at a single target was mapped to a forward flick of the Nunchuk. Fair enough. But the totally opposite command of dismissing your whole squad from active duty and having them retreat backward into "standby" mode was mapped to a sideways waggle of the 'chuk – so in several critical moments when I needed all my soldiers to press their attack as quickly as possible, the game interpreted my left hand's movement as calling for them to fall back instead. Not great.

I'm calling attention to a few faults of Wii U Pikmin 3 now not because I want to retcon my old glowingly positive review (a 9.5 in NF #5), but rather because I'm trying to process through and build a list of things I think Switch Pikmin 3 can improve upon. Not everything will be able to be tweaked, though.

Like the fruit! At first, I liked that the quest of Pikmin 3 was primarily focused on finding pieces of fruit. The story setup is that Alph, Brittany and Charlie's home planet is suffering through a famine, and them gathering food to bring back to save their people is more noble than Pikmin 2's motivation of simply seeking money. But the treasures in Pikmin 2 were much more varied and fun to find than the fruit is here! They were packed with funny product placements and old-school Nintendo memorabilia, such that every one you came across produced a fun "aha!" moment of recognition and mirth. Here, the biggest shockers are when you stumble across a banana or a watermelon.

But I think the one place that could be most easily tweaked to improve my enjoyment would be Mission Mode.

IN PROGRESS

Separate from the main story – which remains a joy, even on a second run so many years later – the Missions are standlone, self-contained quests of a few minutes apiece. They take place in unique environments not seen in the main game, and while many were sold separately as DLC on Wii U, all are being included by default for Deluxe.

They stress me out. They're score attacks for the most part, giving you a limited numbers of minutes to gather all the treasure in the area or battle a whole bunch of baddies – but when the countdown clock strikes zero, you're done. You're kicked out. An evaluation screen appears to give you an assessment of how well you did, and if you want to try again, you have to restart from the beginning.

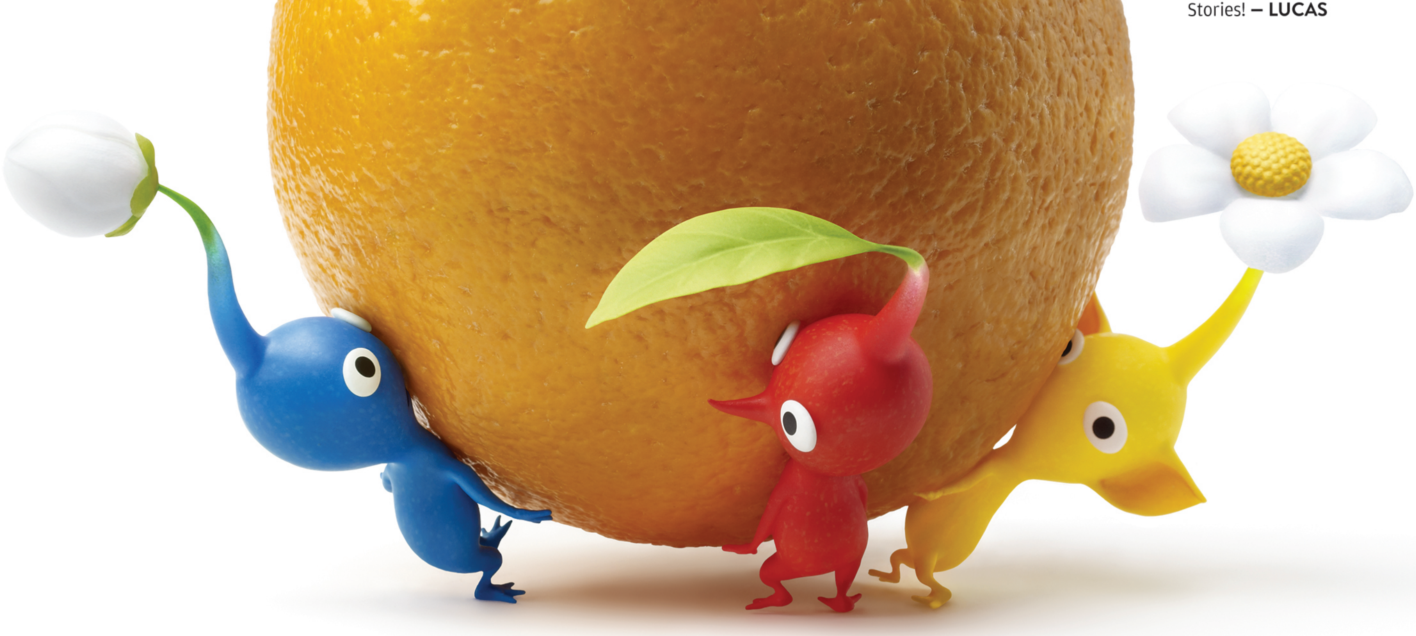
I wish there were an option to shut off that clock. Or have it run in reverse! Start at zero and count up, giving me all the time I want to finish the Mission, and then maybe toss some bonus points my way if I achieve all the goals more quickly. I'm an explorer at heart. I want to take my time and check out these areas in full. As it is, the Missions are only really suited for speedrunners – players who want to play them over and over to go for faster times.

Alright, that's enough nitpicking. I have to lower my expectations so the Switch version can swoop in and surprise me, right? Well, there's one aspect I know will make me smile as I place the Wii U disc back into storage and crack open the cartridge case for Deluxe: the promised resolution of the cliffhanger ending!

I brought this up way back in that NF #5 review seven years ago: I was disappointed that the story wasn't fully told. We never learned in the Wii U version just what mysterious force caused Alph, Brittany and Charlie to crash on the Pikmin planet in the first place. What's more, the credits of the original edition ended with another mysterious something crashing back down to the planet's surface after our heroes had seemingly safely and successfully returned home to their world. So what, or who, was that?

Thankfully, Nintendo's giving us Side Stories in Pikmin 3 Deluxe that should address both of those lingering questions, as one is promised to be a prologue and the other an epilogue.

Maybe, subconsciously, I've been so looking forward to getting those answers that that's why I was driven to replay the main tale on Wii U first. Now, when I begin Deluxe, I can jump straight into those Side Stories! **– LUCAS**



DATING SIMULATION

ARCADE PUZZLER

8.5

Relationship Issues

CATHERINE: FULL BODY

RELATIONSHIPS ARE PUZZLING. Just when you think you know what you want, and how to get it, the other person (or people!) you're involved with throws a curveball your way, and you have to pivot before things fall apart. This is true for friends, families, coworkers . . . and especially romantic partners. Catherine: Full Body takes this "relationships as puzzles" metaphor literally, existing in a genre that stacks dating sim elements on top of classic block-moving and climbing arcade-y puzzle action.

Vincent, the star of the show, doesn't know what to do. He's been dating a woman, Katherine McBride, for a few years, and she's starting to push him toward a more serious commitment. Then, before he knows it, he finds himself entangled in a secret connection with Catherine, a different woman entirely, who represents his temptation to be, let's just say . . . less than monogamous. On top of that, in a bizarre twist of fate, he ends up looking after yet *another* woman, Rin, who is suffering from amnesia. Think it's a strange coincidence that Vincent ends up bouncing between romantic liaisons with three people who all have essentially the same name? You don't know the half of it. Just wait until you see his dreams!

Every night Vincent turns into a sheep. He's then forced to climb a giant supernatural tower. Sometimes Katherine/Catherine/Rin are there too, and depending on how he handles those interactions, he may end up in love, all alone . . . or dead.

It's an interesting enough story, especially for anyone struggling to trust themselves and others with the contract of intimacy, but it's somewhat misogynistic, painting men as the victims of women wielding the power of sexuality, social pressure or both. On the upside, the Rin storyline does a fairly good job with LGBT representation, something other titles in the Persona universe sometimes struggle with. Sure, like most of the narrative, it's expressed through fairly cliché fantasy sci-fi metaphors, but it's the thought that counts.

The good news is, you can skip the cutscenes if you're not into it. I'm sure many fans would cry foul at that suggestion, as the team at Atlus did an amazing job with the animation, multiple endings and overall art direction here, but frankly Vincent is not a hero, and I was not at all invested in his emotional journey.

Where Catherine really got its hooks in me was the actual playing of it. There's the tower climbing in the campaign. There's a game-within-a-game called Super Rapunzel that uses the same core engine, but with some new rules. And then there's a side mode where you can play as more likable leads than Vincent, including Rin, Catherine and even Joker from Persona 5! It's an incredibly deep formula, with more room for skill building than I would have expected.

Both speed and strategy count for everything as you push and pull blocks to make a climbable structure. There are multiple kinds of trick blocks to learn to work to your advantage, items to activate in a pinch and other bonuses for the brave to strive for along their ascension. In harder stages, you'll have to plan things five or six moves in advance, using real problem-solving skills that you've built along the way, with the pressure never letting up and your chances for survival always in question.

Catherine: Full Body more than deserves its M rating, and in many ways, it reminds me of the bygone days of "adult" magazines in print – those publications that the majority purchased for their racy photos (but the minority claimed to purchase for the quality of their articles). Likewise, with this highly suggestive adventure, I was left cold by the "adult content," but was totally enthralled with its brainy gameplay! **– JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: STUDIO ZERO RATING: M

7.0

One Odd Investigation

DEADLY PREMONITION 2: A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

SOME GAMES CAN'T be outdone, even when they're undercooked to begin with. Take the first Deadly Premonition: a hilarious horror detective adventure that constantly shifts between being "very bad," "so bad it's good" and "actually great." It captures a certain kind of smelly lightning in a bottle that can't be replicated.

This sequel has some of those qualities. It's low-budget, with laughably bad framerates and stiff character models – but this time, it feels like the developers are doing it on purpose. Sometimes to replicate the "so bad it's good" quality of the first game, and other times just to cut corners, taking advantage of the forgiving nature of fans that gladly tolerated the technical issues of the original. Regardless of their motivations, Deadly Premonition 2 is at it's best when it completely divorces itself from fan expectations.

That's not to say that all of its allusions to the original are a problem. Leading man Francis York Morgan's signature plastic smile and frequent echoes of various cult movies are nice to revisit. There are also plenty of references to other media, but instead of taking liberally from Twin Peaks as the first game did, this sequel has a joke that's practically a beat-for-beat lift from Thimbleweed Park, and some bio horror stuff that's straight out of Videodrome.

Deadly Premonition 2 also roughly features the same genre clash as the original, merging low-key open world goofs with Ace Attorney-style clue collecting and forays into half-baked survival horror. New for this sequel is a split narrative, which mirrors the game's overall theme of multiple personalities. The game is structured in chapters, leaping between time periods and protagonists. The central tale takes place in 2005, with York on vacation in a little New Orleans-esque town called Le Carre, sucked into yet another supernatural murder mystery. Running parallel to his adventure is a story set in 2019 where new lead Aaliyah Davis explores the mind of Francis *Zack* Morgan, York's now-deteriorated, degenerated alter ego.

The way Zack is used in the narrative truly sets this sequel apart from the original. In Deadly Premonition 1, York referred to the player as Zack for most of the game. In the sequel, that fourth wall-breaking move is largely gone, as we see Zack as his own person in the very first scene. It's a loss for players who saw themselves as Zack, but a gain for those who wanted to see York and Zack's connection more fully explained. I'm of both minds on the topic . . . which may actually be what the developers wanted me to feel.

Actually, I'm struggling to think of any part of the game that isn't a mixed bag. The combat is much better than the original, with a cool new lock-on gun system and a much larger variety of things to shoot at. But at night in the overworld, one kind of enemy constantly respawns. The only way to avoid being totally annoyed by this design oversight is to use the game's fast travel system (a pre-Uber ride-sharing service with a wild woman named Raven Yahoo) as often as possible.

York, too, is split down the middle, not unlike the half human, half Vulcan Spock from Star Trek. He understands regular people on an incredibly detailed and accurate level, but he cannot experience life as one, leaving him to behave in ways that are often insensitive and confusing. Likewise, the overall narrative swings between compassion and disregard around issues of race, gender and abuse.

The scattered blessings of Deadly Premonition 2 are often disguised by the game's many blemishes, but I'm still more than happy that I got to drink in another adventure with York and company. **– JONATHAN**

SWITCH **PUBLISHER:** RISING STAR GAMES **DEVELOPER:** TOYBOX **RATING:** M

Three in 3D Made HD

SUPER MARIO 3D ALL-STARS

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E

SCENARIO 1 WON again.

As with Super Mario 3D World, the Switch re-release of these three titles wasn't yet 100% confirmed when we went to press with our previous issue – so we predicted what would happen as best we could. The first scenario we posited turned out to be the correct one, except for a minor flip-flop in the name – we guessed "All-Stars 3D" and not "3D All-Stars" – but otherwise we were spot-on: The trio of mainline 3D Mario games from the N64, GameCube and Wii generations have indeed come together in a combined collection for the Nintendo Switch!

. . . Unfortunately, it's a collection that doesn't quite live up to the lofty "All-Stars" name.

Expectations were high. I personally let my imagination run a bit wild when conceiving what this compilation might contain . . . and it turns out that all I managed to accomplish was setting myself (and maybe many of you) up for disappointment. Because while the rumor-fueled prediction of this three-game collection did turn out to be true, the amount of individual effort invested into each game in the set has fallen well under the bar I set in NF #48's hopeful preview.

In the battle of wishful dreams versus crushing reality, Super Mario 64 fares the worst. I had myself good and convinced that we were on the verge of a reveal of a total revamp! I though that the foundation laid in the superb Super Mario Odyssey would be what any fresh return to the original 3D Mario adventure would be built on. I mean, it was right there! That 2017 masterpiece paid such direct homage to Super Mario 64 – particularly at the end of the game when *(*spoiler*)* Mario and Cappy visited a full, modern remake of Peach Castle's and its surrounding grounds, complete with Yoshi up on the roof, paintings to leap into and even a costume that fully transformed Mario back into his first-ever polygonal character model. I thought for sure Nintendo would just work with all of that as a starting point and reimagine the entire adventure of Super Mario 64 in the Odyssey engine.

Nope! Not at all. We got a straight-up emulation of the original instead.

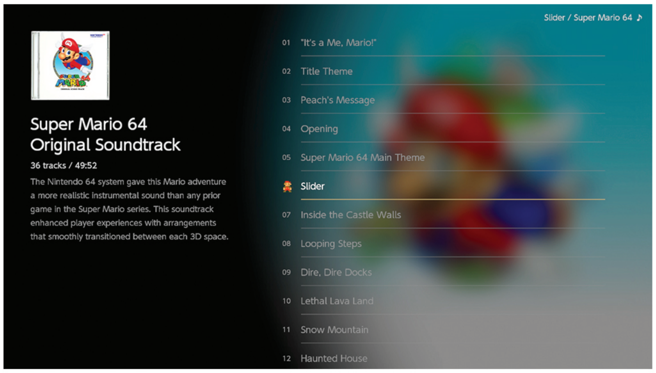
Like the Virtual Console service never died, here again – just like on the Wii and then on the Wii U – it's the Day 1 Nintendo 64 experience all over again. (Well, OK, this is actually the slightly upgraded 1997 version of the game that added Rumble Pak support, but still!)

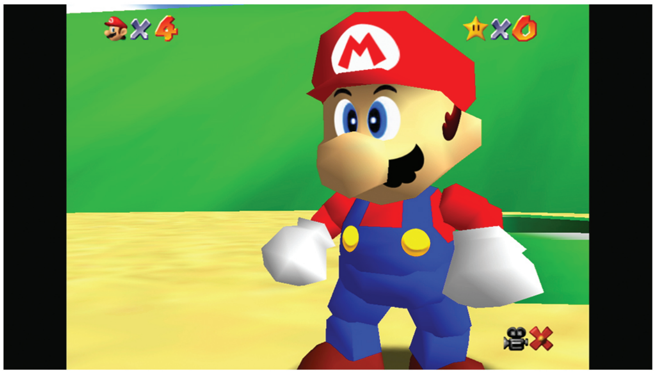
Super Mario 64 is an industry icon, and a game that represented a critical turning point in video game history. But I thought bringing it back again here nearly a quarter-century after its original release (and selling it under the All-Stars brand name!) would have demanded a little more effort be put into its presentation. It's had its rendering resolution increased to 720p – barely qualifying under the definition of "high definition" – and it does look better than it ever has before. But . . . that's it? No expanded field of view to make it widescreen, at least? A full Odyssey engine remake would have been a lot of work, I realize, but man, I didn't think we'd end up with the bare minimum instead.

Speaking of bare minimums, I said last time that Sunshine could get by with just a 16:9 ratio expansion for its minimum-effort Switch conversion, and sure enough that's what we've been given here. And then I said that Galaxy would just need a bump up into HD resolution, and that's what it got. Nothing more. So I guess the bar I set was low enough for those two to clear.

Beyond these three 3D classics making a comeback, this collection also offers a simple soundtrack mode that lets you listen to the tunes from each. And . . . that's it for the extras. Sheesh!

But before I let myself slide further into a negative rant here, let's at least give the games a chance to make their case one a time, through a trio of reviews-within-this-review:





SUPER MARIO 64

THERE I WAS – down in my parent's basement. Three days before the official launch of the Nintendo 64. Staring at a blocky Mario and a weird controller, ready to have my first 3D spatial adventure. You see, we'd gone to Best Buy for something else and saw the launch games displayed, but no consoles. Dismayed, we headed to check out with our other goods. Then, I saw them. I spied the consoles in cages by the checkout counters high up against the wall. I inquired about them, and an employee took pity on me and sold me one, breaking the street date. So, for three days I was the envy of all my friends, and I was able to experience what then was bottled lightning.

Can Nintendo provide that same magic for players today? Sure, but not with Super Mario 64.

As many players will start from the beginning, it makes sense to present Super Mario 64 – such a nostalgic and iconic creation – in its original form. In fact, playing the three 3D All-Stars one after another shows Nintendo's progress in 3D space. With each iteration, things become technically more savvy and therefore more enjoyable. But this is where the debate begins: to remaster, or preserve? Can you provide the same experience with some modern improvements? Nintendo eschewed this thinking and elected to aim for stark preservation, and nobody should be surprised. The choice to bring back Super Mario 64 with very few changes on an HD console is a bold one, but Nintendo has always favored nostalgia over remasters.

The original 4:3 aspect ratio and textures are dated, but quaint. I played the game docked with a Pro Controller, and it may be the most comfortable way I've ever played the game. Let's face it: The N64 controller was ergonomic but awkward, and the port on DS was tough – having to choose between the D-Pad or the thumb nub on a strap for navigating 3D space. None were ideal, but at least the game benefits from external technology bettering itself.

Speaking of Super Mario 64 DS, that remake's bonus levels and characters are missing from this version. No Goomboss, no Chief Chilly, etc. It's the original in every sense, with only some "upscaling" happening behind the scenes in the emulator Nintendo built for this adventure. Aside from the blur effect being sharpened, other changes were indiscernible outside of the game talking about Switch buttons versus N64 buttons, and that is likely as designed. I think the most stark issue is when polygonal Bowser shows up. He just looks odd these days!

Playing in Handheld Mode is not as nice, as the aspect ratio is further shrunk and, without any sort of border graphic in place of the empty void of space surrounding the action, it looks amateurish. This is all very technical though. The game may look a little rough, but it plays exactly the same.

Mario always felt super fluid and easy to control in his first 3D outing, and that was always such an impressive feat, as many of us were just learning to navigate a 3D space in the third person when the game came out. However, the camera's clunkiness is exacerbated by assigning it to the right stick, forcing players to recall more modern games and to be disappointed when it gets "stuck" or loses sight of Mario. Without getting further into the weeds of the "preservation vs. remastering" debate, more fine tuning or modernization should have at least occurred in regards to the camera. It wouldn't have fundamentally altered the experience.

As my kids played the game, they would continuously laugh at the crude shapes meant to represent things like penguins, eels, bunnies and plumbers. However, they did keep playing it, making remarks like "It looks kinda like Minecraft," and "LEGO Mario makes more sense now." The important part is that while the visuals may not hold up, the gameplay and overall entertainment of the game is still interesting to a younger generation.

Revisiting all the old haunts (some literally haunted) brought me back to a bygone era where tree cutouts were acceptable and clipping into walls was the norm. But as someone who played the game in those halcyon days, I would've preferred a full remaster with all the Super Mario 64 DS content and more. Seeing Super Mario 64 rendered with Super Mario Odyssey graphics would have forced me to play through it to 100% all over again, but as it stands now, it's more of a relic than it is a need-to-play experience. Even simple additions to the game, like inserting the now-infamous Luigi, would have made it more special than just a ROM in an emulator.

Not many experiences from the N64 stand the test of time, but the precedents that the console produced are timeless. Plus, having the great soundtrack available from the start is nice and makes the compilation more appealing. **– BRETT**

SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

OF THE THREE titles in this collection, Super Mario Sunshine is likely the one many will be experiencing for the first time. While both 64 and Galaxy have been re-released before, Sunshine had remained locked to the GameCube for 18 years before now. Considering how poorly the purple lunch box sold, even the staunchest Mario fans could have unknowingly passed over this black sheep.

Nintendo found themselves in a bind at the turn of the century, saddled with the need to publish key software quickly enough to hopefully reverse the GameCube's miserable market trajectory. That meant significant corners had to be cut during software development, leading to games that often felt undercooked. Sunshine was one such victim – yet despite its massive shortcomings, some players swear up and down that 3D Mario has never shined brighter.

Sunshine separates itself from its predecessor the second you boot the game and are greeted by a fully voiced opening movie. Yes, it's the first and only Nintendo-published Mario game with proper voice acting in every cutscene! (Although, after hearing these poor performances, it's probably for the best that the series has stuck to text boxes ever since.)

Peach and Mario have decided to take a vacation on the tropical Isle Delfino, but ol' Jumpman is arrested upon arrival and charged with cleanup duty. Apparently, some Mario imposter has been running around spraying magical ink on everything and scattering the Shine Sprites. Thus, Mario must pull a reverse Splatoon and wash away the graffiti while getting to the bottom of this mystery.

Since the entire adventure takes place on this one island, each main course adheres to the holiday theme. Visit a sun-drenched village! Go Blooper surfing by the harbor! Ride the rollercoaster at the beachside amusement park! It's hard to visually convey difficulty scaling from one level to the next when they all look to have been pulled from a collection of Spring Break postcards. And remember how 64 featured 15 wild worlds to explore? Sunshine cuts that number down to a paltry seven, supplemented by the most obnoxious padding ever conceived (which I'll touch upon later).

On the upside, Sunshine is probably the most technical Mario game thanks to the inclusion of F.L.U.D.D., a versatile water pack that lets our wrongly convicted paisano hose down the mess left by his shadowy doppelgänger. By switching to the Hover Nozzle, F.L.U.D.D. grants robust aerial mobility – for example, you can chain a side somersault into a wall jump followed by a hover to reach heights you typically couldn't.

Within each course is at least one secret area in which F.L.U.D.D. is stolen, forcing you to solely rely on your jumping proficiency. What's supposed to be a fun challenge instead reveals how F.L.U.D.D. has been masking Sunshine's imprecise controls – you don't realize how tough it is to judge depth until the hover ability that allows for mid-air course correction has been stripped away. You can even swap to either of the other two 3D All-Stars titles to confirm firsthand that Sunshine's Mario doesn't operate as tightly!

This lack of polish extends to the game's most egregious challenges, which typically involve collecting eight Red Coins. Failed to scoop them up within a time limit? Life lost! Fell off a lily pad because using the Squirt Nozzle to propel yourself like a motorboat is incredibly finicky, so you leaped toward a missed coin in a last-ditch effort? Death by poison water! Fighting against invisible strings pulling you away from your intended trajectory inside a giant pachinko machine? Goodbye sanity! Never has there been a Mario adventure like this one with such unoptimized level design.

Then there are the Blue Coins – the sole reason, by the way, that I gave up on attempting 100% completion back in 2002. Sunshine features 120 Shine Sprites, the same number as Power Stars in 64, but only 96 are obtainable via normal means. The rest are collected by exchanging 10 Blue Coins apiece. Where are these elusive coins? Some are in plain sight. Others appear after washing the ink off of NPCs, or having Yoshi eat a cluster of blue butterflies. And so on. You're given no hints to their whereabouts as you would be for Shines, and some are only available during specific Shine missions. It's pure busy work meant to make up for the fact that there simply isn't enough content in this game.

Super Mario Sunshine does have its moments, but in my eyes it sits at the lower end of the Mario hierarchy. I had hoped that the HD remaster treatment would address these hangups, but considering Nintendo couldn't even include camera control options, we're left with the same old exercise in frustration, deceptively disguised as a relaxing island getaway. **– TONY**

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

LASTLY, WE ARRIVE at Super Mario Galaxy. It is unquestionably a masterpiece. However, that label comes with something of a caveat: It is a masterpiece designed specifically for the Wii, which begs the question of how well such a tailored design can translate over to other hardware.

For the Nintendo Switch, the issues are many: You have to consider how well it functions when using Joy-Cons while the Switch is docked to the TV, with the Pro Controller in the same instance, as well as in Handheld Mode. (For those wondering about Tabletop Mode, that's basically identical to the TV Mode, just with a smaller screen.)

Before getting into how things work with the new setups, a quick refresher may be in order for how the game originally played on the Wii. Using a Wii Remote and Nunchuk setup, you would shake either controller to make Mario perform a spin, and use the IR pointer to move a cursor to gather Star Bits, target enemies to shoot with said Star Bits and activate various other things from menu icons to in-game devices used to move Mario along his galactic journey.

Now, no matter which configuration you're using, you've got two choices for making Mario spin: You can either shake the controller, or press the Y or X Button. While the button approach is handy, particularly with the Pro Controller and in Handheld Mode, I personally found there's a nice rhythm to shaking the Joy-Con controller that seems to better coincide with the cooldown time of the move, whereas pressing the button feels like it leaves more of a pause as you wait to be able to do it again. It's only about a second, but I just felt that second a bit more with the button press.

The most authentic way to recreate the Wii experience, of course, is to play with a single Joy-Con in each hand. With this, you can use the motion sensor in the right Joy-Con to move the cursor around, gathering Star Bits, like you do. However, without the Wii's IR pointer and sensor bar, the cursor tends to fall out of alignment. You can recenter it as you please with a quick press of the R Button, which is good – but even with a simple solution to the problem, the frequency of having to help the Switch get itself back in sync with old Wii tech can get frustrating. We're talking after every other shake or wild movement to gather Star Bits here, if not more.

The Pro Controller acts similarly to Joy-Con use, right down to having to frequently realign the cursor, which is moved in this case by simply tilting the whole controller. While you can shake the controller to make Mario spin here as well, you'll find the button press a better fit when playing with the Pro.

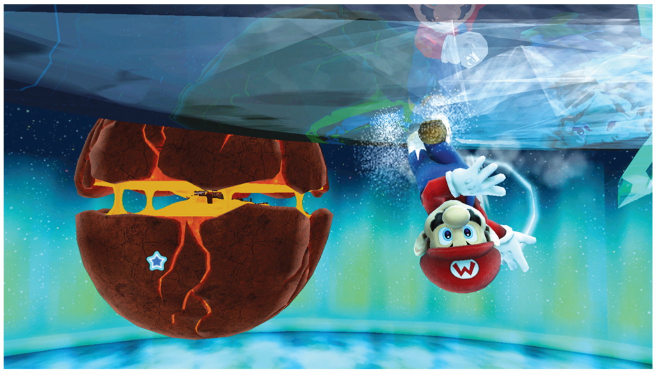
Similarly, buttons are the way to go in Handheld Mode. However, this mode employs the touchscreen to a significant degree to make up for the lack of cursor-pointing action. Instead, you basically touch whatever you would normally use the controller to point at, be it menu icons, Star Bits or enemies. However, you really need to hold your finger to the screen if you're trying to collect Star Bits, as a tap will fire one off, effectively leaving you with the same number you had to start with if you try to tap a single one. And of course, doing this means taking your hand off of one connected Joy-Con or the other.

Speaking of the menus, that's another area where this release tends to falter a little bit, as it retains the same cursor-based interaction as the original Wii release. The moment is brief as you come to realize that the control stick will be of no use here, but it makes an odd first impression.

Some other findings I discovered while replaying the game is that while the pointer aspect might be a little clunkier, the motion-controlled mini-game aspect feels better than ever! At least in most cases. I recall Ray Surfing giving me a bit of trouble with the Wii Remote, but I cleared it with a Joy-Con and Pro Controller on my first tries, and repeatedly after. That is, until I tried Handheld Mode – there, you're told to turn the entire Switch as if it were a steering wheel, and if you'll pardon the expression, I found it more difficult to come to grips with.

Visually, Super Mario Galaxy looks superb now rendered in high definition. It was already a widescreen game back in 2007, so it didn't need to expand its real estate to 16:9 after the fact, as Sunshine did for this collection – it just needed a bump up in resolution, and it got one, and it looks great.

When advertising Super Mario World, Nintendo once proudly boasted that it came only as part of the system it was created for, the Super NES. While that landmark title has lost little, if anything, over the course of myriad re-releases on more modern platforms, Super Mario Galaxy definitely manages to feel a little more removed from the system it was first created for. With that said, it's not too bad, and this might just be as good as we can hope for without a full recreation of the Wii's hardware. **– DAVID**



. . . And now back to me to wrap things up.

I asked Brett, Tony and David to each take on one game apiece and give them individual attention inside this overall review of Super Mario 3D All-Stars as a whole, which is something we've never done before here in NF. But that's because this is a unique situation: 3D All-Stars is a collection of three games that are, taken alone, each strong titles – but the collection itself is weak.

Nintendo should have done more. Rumors of these games coming to the Switch began swirling years ago, but reports indicate that development of this collection only began this past April – so this was a pretty quick-and-dirty project that wasn't treated with much respect. I'm a little shocked by that, because Nintendo already had to deal with backlash from fans the last time they trotted out the All-Stars brand. That was when, back on the Wii, they marked the 25th anniversary of Super Mario Bros. by re-releasing the SNES All-Stars. Literally just the 16-bit ROM image burned onto a Wii disc.

3D All-Stars isn't *that* severely thoughtless, but it comes close. All three games have been given very little effort in this conversion, and the value of including the soundtracks, to me, is minimal. They're all on YouTube anyway.

Whatever happened to the wonder of the first Super Mario All-Stars? The effort? The desire to actually give truly trailblazing Mario titles an adequate amount of respect? Back in 1993, the first Super Mario All-Stars was superb. It collected four different NES Mario adventures into one package, which would have already been a great value at the checkout counter. But rather than just reissue them in their old 8-bit forms, all four were totally visually overhauled into glorious 16-bit splendor! And you could save your progress in any of them. And one of the games, The Lost Levels, was totally new to Western audiences! Really, it's wild how I can recall how thrilled I was by that package and contrast that feeling with how underwhelmed I've been by this one.

As I said earlier (and as The Ox argued way back in the Inbox), Super Mario 64 deserved much more in particular. I've had fun playing it once more, sure, but when an official release can't measure up to what fans are doing for a game for free on PC, it's embarassing.

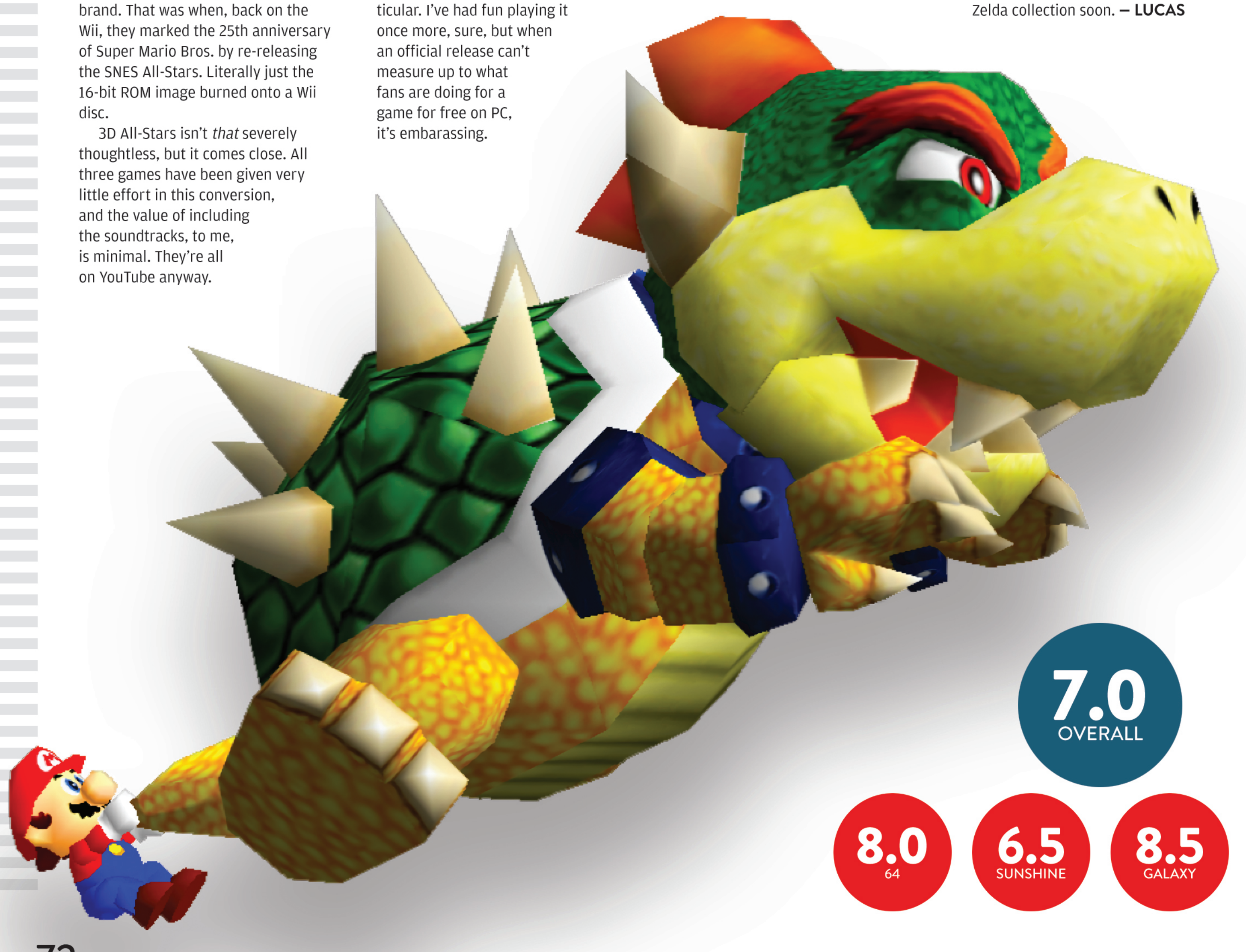
Super Mario Sunshine has had my memory sullied a bit by my playing it again on Switch, as it's just *so* janky. Collision detection is off, Mario will just clip through platforms sometimes – and the F.L.U.D.D. control is inverted from what it was on the GameCube, with no option to revert back to what it originally was! Why would you do that? That boggles my mind. It's as dumb as that old Mega Man re-release Capcom put out that mapped jumping to the B Button and shooting to A.

Galaxy? Galaxy's mostly fine. As the most modern of the three, it didn't suffer in the transition quite as much. I personally didn't have as much trouble with needing to recenter the cursor as often as David seems to have had, but then I stuck with using the buttons to make Mario spin rather than waggle for that attack.

When it's all said and done, a poor collection of one good (Sunshine) and two great (64 and Galaxy) adventures averages out to be, well, average. Nintendo had the chance to knock this one out of the park, but they settled for a bunt.

However! I am still hopeful for the future. With my expectations now readjusted, I can see that there are exciting opportunities ahead in the form of more re-releases from the N64, GameCube and Wii generations. Nintendo had to build new emulators to bring these three Mario games back to life, and surely they'll use them to also revive other hits from those eras, right? Games that didn't rely too heavily on gimmicks like Wii motion control could translate well to the Switch, sidestepping the problems we've pointed out here.

. . . Or else we'll just be back with the same set of complaints for a 3D Zelda collection soon. **– LUCAS**



7.0 OVERALL

8.0 64

6.5 SUNSHINE

8.5 GALAXY

6.0

The Guardian of Winter

ARY AND THE SECRET OF SEASONS

THE ZELDA BRAND has reclaimed my brain. My attention drifts away from Link's adventures when no new games in his series are on the horizon, but with Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity dropping in November, the sequel to Breath of the Wild deep into development and the 35th anniversary of the franchise coming up in just a few months, my focus is once again fixed on that world of Rupees and Cuccos. So, to help me endure the wait for those new Zeldas, I happily booted up Ary and the Secret of Seasons.

This is not a Zelda game, of course, but it aspires to be. We've seen a lot of these Zelda-alikes come and go over the years, but this one caught my eye because of a unique gameplay hook: the power of control the seasons.

Aryelle ("Ary" for short) is a young girl whose father is the Guardian of Winter. Along with the three other Guardians – of Spring, Summer and Fall – he keeps the world in balance and prevents the return of an ancient evil that was sealed away in the past. As the story begins, Ary's father is planning to pass along his Guardian duties to his son (Ary's brother), Flynn. But Flynn goes missing! So Aryelle takes it upon herself to become the first-ever female Guardian and set out on a quest to find her brother and save the world. (Against her father's wishes!) It's a strong story setup, and it got me excited to begin to play.

. . . That excitement lasted for a few minutes, maybe. Because this game is really rough around the edges.

Ary and the Secret of Seasons plays like an in-house, in-progress build of a Zelda game that's still two years away from release. The control is clunky. The hitboxes and collision seem off. It's easy to get stuck in different spots in the environment and have to reload a save file, or else trigger crashes that fling you back to a previous check-point too. And the load times! Yowch!! I haven't endured loading screens this long in years.

It's strikingly unpolished. Even simple elements of the user interface seem unfinished. Take the sidequest notes, for example. Early on I triggered a simple sidequest asking me to talk to two different individuals in the game's opening town. A notification appeared on the screen to track my progress toward this easy goal. Basic, simple stuff, right? But then I couldn't find the second person. I searched the whole town and couldn't track down this one particular individual in order to trigger that one particular dialogue exchange, and I finally decided to just skip finishing that sidequest and move on . . . but the notification remained. That little text reminder stayed locked on-screen for hours afterward, even as I was fighting enemies and delving through dungeons. "Don't forget to go talk to Bob!" Yeah, thanks game, I remember.

The high point of the game is that aforementioned unique gameplay hook, as Ary can trigger "season spheres" to appear at will. You'll be walking through a lush, green field, for instance, and at the press of a button you can cause an orb of winter wonder to spawn into existence. Doing so will freeze water to create platforms to jump on, or trigger switches, or even transform enemies into different forms. It's neat. The Zelda series itself did the whole "weather control" thing way back in Oracle of Seasons on the Game Boy Color, but never revisited it after that, so it's cool to see the same idea finally brought to life in 3D.

One interesting gameplay gimmick isn't enough to counterbalance all of the problems that tag along after it, though. I found myself frustrated by Ary and the Secret of Seasons much more often than I found myself having fun, and if I was losing patience with it, I can't imagine anyone else having any better of an experience.

Let's chalk this one up to a fairly young development team biting off a bit more than they can chew and hope that their next effort is a little less ambitious and a lot more polished. There's potential here, so I'll keep an eye on what this same studio decides to do next. **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: MODUS GAMES
DEVELOPER: EXIIN RATING: E10+

Introducing the Ashen Chevalier

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS OF COLD STEEL III

NIHON FALCOM'S NEWEST foray on the Nintendo Switch comes in the form of The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel III: a jam-packed JRPG that excels with its story, characters and turn-based combat.

First released on the PlayStation 4 in Japan in 2017, NIS America localized the game, with the English version landing on the PS4 in October 2019. Then it hit PC and Switch in March and June 2020, respectively. The Trails of Cold Steel series is part of Falcom's larger Trails brand, which began in 2004. The franchise also includes the three Trails in the Sky games and Zero no Kiseki and Ao no Kiseki, a duology that hasn't been officially localized.

For JRPG fans, Cold Steel III has the genre's key staples, and it executes them quite well. The story weaves together political intrigue and ancient magical lore into a narrative with plenty of twists and turns.

Protagonist Rean Schwarzer and the cast that accompanies him are endearing and multi-faceted. The combat features an intricate turn-based system that allows you to customize characters with different stats, skills and magical abilities.

This game's release on Switch begs a big question, however, and I think it needs to be addressed before delving deeper into the game's story and mechanics: There's that nagging "III" in the title. Does this game provide a suitable starting point for new players?

Cold Steel III is the third of four games in the series, and it's the eighth Trails game overall. It's important to know that all of the Trails games are interconnected. They have lore, characters, factions, storylines and settings that overlap. So if you haven't played all of the Trails games or the two previous Cold Steel games, yes, there will be reveals, references and reunions you may miss – or that may not pack as much of a punch.

But Cold Steel III can still be a sufficient starting point thanks to its accessibility and overall premise – and this sequel's gameplay, menus, combat interface, visuals, battle speed and difficulty are all superior to the rest of the games in the series that have been localized.

The first two Cold Steel games were initially developed for the PS3 and Vita, and they feel a bit dated, even in their enhanced PS4 ports. Cold Steel III runs well on the Switch, too, both in TV and Handheld Mode. The gameplay feels just as fluid as it does on PS4 – with one exception. In Handheld Mode the camera is too sensitive, especially when you change angles to turn around and go up and down stairs. It takes a little while to get used to. The game doesn't look its best in Handheld Mode either. Many of the backgrounds in cutscenes are blurry, and I didn't notice that in TV Mode.

Cold Steel III's premise also provides a good start for players because it features a new beginning for the series' main character, Rean. You step into his shoes as he takes on a new job and meets different characters, and this allows players to organically learn about crucial events that happened in the first two games. Also, the game's start menu features a lengthy Backstory section that includes plot summaries, character profiles and setting details from the previous games, so you can always consult those if you need more information.

I read the Backstory section before starting Cold Steel III, and revisited it often, despite playing the first two games on PS4. The amount of world building Falcom has placed in these games is both impressive and difficult to keep up with.

The Trails of Cold Steel series is Rean's story first and foremost, and the third game finds him in new territory.

In the first two games, Rean is a student at Thors Military Academy, a prestigious school in the Erebonian Empire. While he attends school, Rean is placed in Class VII, a new and experimental class that features students from different backgrounds and social classes. The empire's class system is a source of major conflict throughout the series, so Class VII has a rough start. The students grow and learn together, though, and become heroes by the end of Trails of Cold Steel II – especially Rean, who uses his ability to wield the sentient mecha Valimar to win the day.

In Cold Steel III, around a year and a half has passed, and Rean is trying to balance his role as a hero of Erebonia and his job as a teacher at the Thors Academy's new branch campus. He's given the task of guiding a new Class VII, which includes the stubborn and spunky Juna Crawford, the pensive swordsman Kurt Vander, the shy yet blunt special ops agent Altina and others.

Much of the game involves Rean and his students on a school year schedule. It has a calendar system like those found in Atlus' Persona series, though it's more restrictive. Specific days are set for learning at the academy, going on field exercises in and outside the empire, and free days where you can build up bonds with Class VII and other characters. The game gives players the most agency on free days, where you get a limited number of bonding points to use. Spending a point provides a unique cutscene with a character, but they are not all created equal: Some scenes provide deep moments between Rean and his companions, while others feel shallow. (Near the end of the game, some bonding scenes will give you the option of a little romance, too.)

This school year formula stays the same throughout the majority of the game, and it gets somewhat repetitive. It also doesn't help that the game is a bit too long. You really feel the bloat of it near the end, especially if you take on several of the side missions, which mostly don't go beyond a simple fetchquest design.

Thankfully, the variety of field study locations spices things up. They work in tandem with the game's story, giving several perspectives of the Erebonian Empire and its problems after conquering a lot of territory in a short amount of time.

The empire's current state of affairs leads to Rean and his students dealing with conflicts that push them to their limits and allow them to grow closer. It also shows Rean's inner struggle about his role within the empire and the effects it's had on him and those around him. Out of all the conflicts in the game, this one inside of Rean is the best and most excruciating, and it really shows Falcom's strength in executing character development. By the end, these characters will frustrate you, compel you to cheer them on . . . and break your heart.

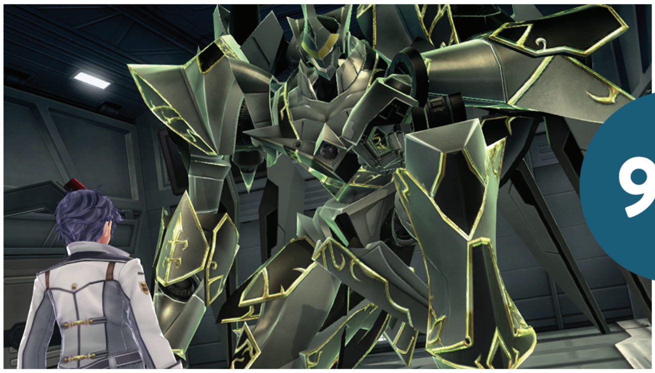
Another area where Cold Steel III shines is its detailed turn-based combat system, which allows for some extreme customization and requires dedication from players. It starts by picking a four-person team, and the roster will change often throughout the story to keep things interesting. Once you enter combat, you have the basic Attack, Move and Use Item selections along with actions unique to the Trails series: Crafts and Arts. Crafts are moves tied to each character and have a variety of effects and ranges. Arts are elemental moves that can be used to attack, heal and buff up allies.

You can assign characters different Arts by equipping them with Quartz: resources you can make or find while exploring the world. Using Quartz allows for deep customization in Cold Steel III's combat. With them, you can change your characters' builds based on the types of enemies you face, and this is absolutely necessary as you get deeper into the game and the boss battles get harder. Before most boss battles, I found myself mulling over my Quartz layout for at least 30 minutes, and it's oh so satisfying when your combination gets the job done!

Cold Steel III also introduces some new elements into combat: Break Gauges and Brave Orders. Your attacks can now break enemies by reducing their gauge, leaving them in a more vulnerable state. When you activate Brave Orders, they provide different buffs for a fixed number of turns and are unique to each character. These new additions add more layers to Cold Steel's already deep combat system.

If you're looking for a solid JRPG experience on the Switch, Cold Steel III will give you that and more if you take the time to dive deep into its story and combat. While it requires some patience and perseverance at the start, this game pays off that effort in spades by the end, setting the stage for a finale that will leave players hungering for Cold Steel IV's Switch release in 2021! **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA
DEVELOPER: NIHON FALCOM
RATING: T



9.0

THIRD OPINION
RING FIT ADVENTURE

I CLAIMED THE last slice of my birthday cake. I ate it. I took my fork and plate to the dishwasher, headed downstairs to the Switch and fired up Ring Fit Adventure. The time for sweets was over – now it was time for sweat.

I turned 39 recently, and as is common for men approaching the mark of 40 years old, my attention has been turning more toward my health. I've never had to worry about it much in the past. Particularly my weight – I was a skinny kid who grew up to become a skinny adult, and I've always been able to eat whatever I want without worry of unwanted weight gain. In fact, in my mid-20s I specifically endeavored to put on pounds on purpose, because I was tired of being so rail thin!

Well, time has finally caught up to my once-invincible metabolism, and I've noticed (especially within the last year, during COVID-19 quarantine) that the bathroom scale has at last begun to tell a different tale. My weight's been going up, and though I'm nowhere near any kind of danger zone since I started out so skinny to begin with, I'm nonetheless acting now to keep myself from traveling too far down that path. So sweets have been set aside, and the Ring-Con controller has been picked up.

I was finally able to buy one! At first I'd thought I would begin this fitness quest back at the beginning of 2020, but as we've reported in recent issues, Ring Fit Adventure was sold out for a long stretch of months earlier this year. It's finally more readily available now, so you might be able to make a purchase too if you've also been intending to.

Ring Fit is fascinating. It's an exercise game that makes an effort to address, right from the start, the most pressing problem exercise games have always had to deal with: keeping players motivated to come back again and again. A fitness program isn't going to make any real impact if a user only engages with it once or twice, after all! So Nintendo cooked up another new genre blend, mixing a fitness gaming core with the one category of gaming most known for lengthy quests that take several days, weeks or even months to see through to completion: RPGs. Ring Fit Adventure is equal parts exercise and turn-based battles; it brings together combat and calorie burning.

I love it! It's honestly inspired – where normal JRPGs would have you just choose an attack from a menu and then watch it play out on the screen with a canned animation, Ring Fit forces you to fully participate in each one by physically moving your body. You swing your arms from side to side to strike a line of enemies horizontally; you perform squats to squash them. Defense is dependent on your willpower and ab muscles – you squeeze the Ring-Con against your stomach and hold it there for the duration of each foe's assault against you.

The Ring-Con controller is yet another piece of incredible engineering from the endlessly inventive minds at Nintendo, and it works so well! Seriously, who in the world dreams up the idea for a big flexible plastic donut and builds a whole video game experience around it? I've been impressed at how well it keeps up with the action, translating constant energetic movement into in-game animations while never missing a beat. If history is any indication, this controller will probably just be another of Nintendo's many one-and-done peripheral ideas, and we'll never see it used again (except maybe for a sequel, since Ring Fit has sold so well). But it'll go down in Big N history as one of their best.

Since we ran our first Ring Fit review back in NF #44, the game has been updated to include more content – specifically a Rhythm Game mode! Sure, why not blend in a third genre? It's a great new side dish served alongside the main game's peanut butter & chocolate, as you use squish and stretch the Ring-Con to the beat of various songs to catch notes flying at the screen. It's got a fair variety of tunes to play, including a few Zelda, Splatoon and Mario tracks. It could almost have been its own game, except having to own the Ring-Con to play it probably forced it to just be added to Ring Fit.

I'm hopeful that I'll be able to stick with Ring Fit long enough to see the whole Adventure through to the end, but if I don't, it won't be the fault of the game – like any exercise regiment, success here depends on being able to regularly integrate it into your normal routine. My pride as a gamer might just push me into a healthier body, though! **– LUCAS**

8.5 MATTHEW T.

8.0 REBECCA

9.0 LUCAS

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the past two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
AI: The Somnium Files	8.5	Tony	#44
Animal Crossing: New Horizons	9.0	Rebecca	#46
Astral Chain	8.5	Jonathan	#42
Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night	7.5	Tony	#48
BurgerTime Party!	8.0	Lucas	#44
Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics	8.5	Lucas	#48
Contra: Rogue Corps	7.0	David	#43
Crash Team Racing: Nitro-Fueled	8.0	David	#41
Crystal Crisis	9.0	Jonathan	#40
Daemon X Machina	7.0	Chris	#42
Dark Souls: Remastered	8.0	Chris	#37
Diablo III: Eternal Collection	9.0	Nadia	#37
Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth – Complete Edition	8.5	Josh	#44
Dragon Quest Builders 2	9.0	Shesez	#41
Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age – Definitive Edition	9.5	Lucas	#43
Dreamworks Dragons: Dawn of New Riders	7.5	David	#39
Fire Emblem: Three Houses	9.5	Lucas	#41
Fitness Boxing	5.5	Chris	#38
Friday the 13th: The Game – Ultimate Slasher Edition	8.0	Kevin C.	#46
Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered	7.5	Brett	#43
Guacamelee! One-Two Punch Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#42
Heroland	7.0	Rebecca	#45
Ice Age: Scrat's Nutty Adventure!	5.0	Chris	#45
Indivisible	7.0	Tony	#47
Katamari Damacy REROLL	9.5	Tony	#38
Langrisser I & II	8.5	David	#46
Layton's Mystery Journey: Katrielle and the Millionaires' Conspiracy – Deluxe Edition	8.5	Brett	#45
LEGO DC Super-Villains	8.0	Thor	#38
Luigi's Mansion 3	9.0	Chris	#44
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games: Tokyo 2020	8.5	David	#44
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 3: The Black Order	7.0	Brett	#41
Mega Man Zero/ZX Legacy Collection	9.0	David	#45
Model Debut #nicola	7.0	Rebecca	#44
Monster Boy and the Cursed Kingdom	8.5	David	#38
Monster Hunter Generations Ultimate	7.5	Kevin K.	#37
Moonlighter	8.0	Lucas	#39
Moving Out	8.0	Lucas	#47
My Time at Portia	5.5	Chris	#40
Namco Museum Arcade Pac	7.0	Brett	#38
New Super Lucky's Tale	9.0	David	#44
New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe	8.0	Lucas	#38
Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	9.0	Brett	#43
Nickelodeon Kart Racers	5.0	David	#37
Nintendo Labo VR Kit	9.0	Lucas	#40
Paper Mario: The Origami King	8.5	Brett	#48
Paw Patrol: On a Roll	8.5	Lucas	#37
Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! & Let's Go, Eevee!	8.5	Lucas	#37
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX	8.0	Lucas	#46
Pokémon Shield	9.0	Thor	#44
Pokémon Sword	8.0	Lucas	#44
Ring Fit Adventure	8.5	Matthew T.	#44
Rune Factory 4 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#46
Scribblenauts Mega Pack	7.5	David	#37
Sega Genesis Classics	8.5	Brett	#38
SNK 40th Anniversary Collection	8.5	Thor	#38
Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl – Gold	6.0	Brett	#45
Spyro Reignited Trilogy	9.0	David	#42
Star Wars Pinball	9.0	Lucas	#42
Starlink: Battle for Atlas	8.5	David	#37
Story of Seasons: Friends of Mineral Town	7.5	Rebecca	#48
Super Dragon Ball Heroes: World Mission	6.0	Tony	#40
Super Mario Maker 2	10	Tony	#41
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz	7.5	David	#44
Super Smash Bros. Ultimate	10	Lucas	#37
Team Sonic Racing	8.5	David	#41
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening	9.5	Jonathan	#43
The Ninja Saviors: Return of the Warriors	7.0	Jonathan	#44
The Nintendo Switch Lite	9.0	Matthew L.	#43
The Outer Worlds	8.0	Matthew L.	#47
The Sega Genesis Mini	9.0	David	#43
The Wonderful 101: Remastered	9.0	Jonathan	#47
The World Ends With You: Final Remix	6.5	Rebecca	#37
Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore	7.5	Matthew L.	#46
Travis Strikes Again: No More Heroes	8.0	Jonathan	#38
Trials of Mana	8.5	Brett	#47
Trine 4: The Nightmare Prince	9.0	Lucas	#44
Wolfenstein: Youngblood	7.0	Chris	#41
Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition	10	Lucas	#48
Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair	9.0	Tony	#43
Yoshi's Crafted World	7.5	Lucas	#39

3DS

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Etrian Odyssey Nexus	8.5	Nadia	#39
Kirby's Extra Epic Yarn	7.5	Neal	#39
Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story + Bowser Jr.'s Journey	9.0	Neal	#38
Persona Q2: New Cinema Labyrinth	8.0	Matthew L.	#40
Yo-kai Watch 3	8.5	Lucas	#39
Yo-kai Watch Blasters: Red Cat Corps & White Dog Squad	6.5	Lucas	#37

REVIEW REMINDER
PUYO PUYO TETRIS

WHEN I FIRST reviewed the original Puyo Puyo Tetris in NF Issue #28, it was a near-simultaneous launch title for the Nintendo Switch, and no one had any idea what the future would hold for Nintendo's fledgling new console. I gave it an 8.0, citing its wide assortment of online and offline play options and its user-friendly design where you could start playing a solo game directly from the title screen.

Since then, however, it's been outshone by some other notable titles, including the phenomenal Tetris 99. But it still has its advantages – namely, the story mode and the various local multiplayer options. All you need to do is hand someone a Joy-Con, choose whatever modes you'd like to have in your game, and you're in business!

Unfortunately, unless you've got a bunch of friends who have their own copies, you won't be able to get much online action any more. I tried to see if there were any other players looking for opponents while I was writing this (which was during the last full week of September), and every single room option was completely barren. With the impending release of Puyo Puyo Tetris 2, expect the online community to migrate there – and for the original's servers to be eventually shut down – so this is one instance where I would recommend you purchase the follow-up if you want to do any line clearing or Puyo popping online.

It's a small change, but what I'd like to see in Puyo Puyo Tetris 2 are the original Japanese language tracks, especially since the Steam port of the original has them. I'd also be happy if the level skip returns during the story mode, especially since it can be unfriendly to Puyo Puyo newbies.

Overall, if you've got a bunch of puzzle fans in your household or your immediate circle of friends, Puyo Puyo Tetris 1 might still be a worthwhile investment . . . but the sequel will likely have a lot more to offer in terms of online content. **– REBECCA**

INNOVATION IN INVENTION

The Game Boy That Needs No Batteries

Solar-powered Tetris is helping to pioneer a more sustainable future.

THE GAME BOY was designed with the idea of "lateral thinking with withered technology." The result was a portable video game system with a battery life of a modest handful of hours that would go on to endure for more than a decade after. And that was in 1989 – just imagine what could be done with today's technology!

That's just what a group of computer scientists (Jasper de Winkel, Vito Kortbeek and Przemysław Pawełczak from the Netherlands' Delft University of Technology, and Josiah Hester from Northwestern University in Illinois) did . . . by creating a Game Boy that requires no batteries!

Though not *technically* an official Game Boy portable video game system from Nintendo, this unit (called the "Engage") bears a pretty strong resemblance at a first glance: same basic form factor, with a small screen housed above a D-Pad and four buttons, all laid out in the way we know and love. And it plays Tetris and Super Mario Land (and the rest of the pre-Color library), too!

"It was critical from the start of the project that we maintain the feel of a Game Boy," de Winkel told CNET. "We're impersonating the Game Boy," added Hester.

What sets it apart visually, besides its distinct colored shell, is the array of solar panels across the bottom and surrounding the screen. These, coupled with additional power generated by the one thing you do with a Game Boy more than anything else – pressing buttons – are what allow the device to function without the prerequisite four AA batteries.

The Engage exists more as a proof of concept, however, and is by no means perfect. For starters, there's no sound. (And if there's one thing that truly slapped about the original Game Boy, it was its sound – there's a reason some artists still use it to create their own chiptunes, after all). Moreover, there's the issue of duration. With the original Game Boy, you would get around 15 hours of gameplay off of those aforementioned AAs. With the Encore, you get . . . well, about 10 seconds. If the weather is cooperating.

Granted, that's not a whole lot. (Super Mario Land is short, but it's not *that* short.) Fortunately, this is where the group's custom emulation solution comes in. The Encore takes about a second to recharge after expending its reserves, but a second is all it takes for you to lose everything – in normal circumstances. With the framework created here, the Encore will create save data that you can continue from once you get a little juice back in the box.

Nevertheless, this creation marks a significant first step upon which to build. As Hester told CNET, "This could not have been possible even four or five years ago."

The Engage is a push toward a tomorrow where batteries are no longer needed, and while they aren't selling it right now, you might be able to make your own – the team has promised to make the code, designs and hardware information all publicly available for free via Github.

Next, the group plans to continue their work, and they currently have an eye toward reducing the duration of the power interruptions.

"I hope this Game Boy will be enough to draw people's interest," Hester said to CNET, "such that they'll maybe make changes or, at least, think about how they could approach [climate change] in a radical way." **– DAVID**

freethegameboy.info

FANDOM IN THE KITCHEN

Cooking Like Link

The Legend's Cookbook brings the recipes of Hyrule into your home.

LAST YEAR IN Issue #40, we took a look at the EarthBound-themed Mother's Cookbook, where the creators mentioned a new project in the pipeline, based on the many meals Link creates in Breath of the Wild. Thanks to Kickstarter and The Yetee, The Legend's Cookbook – an unofficial Legend of Zelda cookbook with recipes spanning the entire series – will be sure to make any Zelda fan's tummy go "Grumble, Grumble!" The recipes include simple snacks and yummy sweets to hearty soups, grilled seafood and meat dishes, cocktails and mocktails, as well as several pages of useful cooking tips.

Author Peter J. Abreu (a.k.a. "Pwnapplez") is no stranger to video game foodies – his Cucco's Kitchen YouTube videos showcase all sorts of recipes from Nintendo and beyond, from Kirby's Super Spicy Curry to Slowpoke Tails. He grew up traveling around the world (his family works in the airline industry), and many of his recipes draw from his Cuban and Italian family roots, like the Meaty Rice Balls, which swap the usual nori wrapper for slices of prosciutto. "As a Cuban, I eat a lot of rice and ground beef, and I wanted to find a fun new way to put a twist on it," he said.

One of his more "fun" re-creations was Dubious Food, which became chicken drumsticks and vegetables simmered in red wine and topped with a fresh pesto mixture! "Sometimes when you see those wacky and colorful video game foods, the go-to recipes tend to be cakes or other desserts. I wanted to create something people could incorporate into their regular food rotation," he said. He also updated his recipe for a Chateau Romani cocktail – which was his first video for Cucco's Kitchen – for the cookbook. "The original recipe was good, but I knew I could do better," he said.

Many of The Legend's Cookbook's recipes draw on time-tested rustic cooking techniques and natural ingredients, which presented a challenge when it came time to re-create things like bright purple monster cuisine. "Finding ways to dye the food while keeping it edible took a while to figure out," Abreu said. While he – and his crew of assistants – managed to turn Monster Soup purple with purple carrots, their workaround for Monster Curry involved topping a standard curry with a red cabbage and blackberry glaze and serving it with black rice, which was an idea that came from the book's photographer, Patrick Deasy.

The fun's not over yet for this team, though – earlier this year they participated in Kickstarter's Make 100 event and issued limited edition Skulltula pins and a mini recipe collection, and there are also themed sticker sheets and an official apron on sale from The Yetee. In addition, the team's announced their next project: ToeJam & Earl's Funky Fresh Foods of Funkotron, an officially licensed, totally rad cookbook that will whet any '90s kid's appetite! Who's psyched? **– REBECCA**

theyetee.com/collections/legends

RECIPE EXAMPLE

SEAFOOD FRIED RICE

One of the simpler recipes in the book, this shrimp fried rice dish has you sautéing the shrimp in garlic butter and lemon juice before adding it to the rice mixture – rice, carrots, peas, onions and scrambled egg – while stir frying the mixture in a wok and seasoning it with soy sauce, salt and pepper. There are also some sesame seeds for a surprise crunch! The garlic butter gives it a flavor that reminds me of the fried rice served in a Japanese steakhouse, and it serves up enough for two hungry adventurers to refill their hearts.

linky439.itch.io/f-zero-pocket

FAN GAME REVIEW

F-Zero Pocket

What if Captain Falcon had raced on Game Boy Color?

MARIO MAY BE celebrating 35 years of digital dominance, but do you know who's hitting the big 3-0 pretty soon? Captain Falcon, who debuted in the original F-Zero in Japan on November 21, 1990! It's alright if you haven't RSVPed, though. Nintendo never bothered to send out invites, so there won't even be a party to miss!

As tends to be the case when a fondly revered franchise is treated with as much respect by its property holder as black mold, the burden of organizing a proper soirée falls upon the fan game community. Thus we turn toward F-Zero Pocket, a Game Boy Color tribute assembled by French handheld enthusiast Linky439 and released this past September.

It's quite a challenge to make a full-fat console experience work within the limitations of portable hardware, which is why official Game Boy versions of NES and SNES titles often carried a negative stigma. But the fandom has a knack for distilling their favorite games to their essences in a manner that the original developers either can't or won't attempt. (It's that devil-may-care attitude that gave us such gems as 2011's Super Smash Land and an upcoming GBA demake of Fire Emblem: Three Houses!)

Back to F-Zero Pocket, which Linky439 conceived two years ago as a monochrome Game Boy project before its eventual Color upgrade. In its final form, it packs 20 tracks across four cups, plus the entire 30-driver roster from F-Zero X, all at a hardware-accurate resolution of 160 by 144 pixels. (Unfortunately, as Pocket was developed in GameMaker Studio, it won't run on an actual Game Boy Color.)

Since GBC only sported two face buttons, commands here are restricted to just acceleration and braking. That means drifting, mapped to the shoulder buttons in past F-Zeros, is not possible – and believe me, I tried every possible button combo to bank my craft ever tighter, to no avail. Cornering instead demands hugging the inside lane as best you can to prevent slamming into the opposite rail. I'm certain drifting could have been implemented by pressing both the accelerate and brake keys simultaneously, as without it, most of the technicality that the original games were known for is lost.

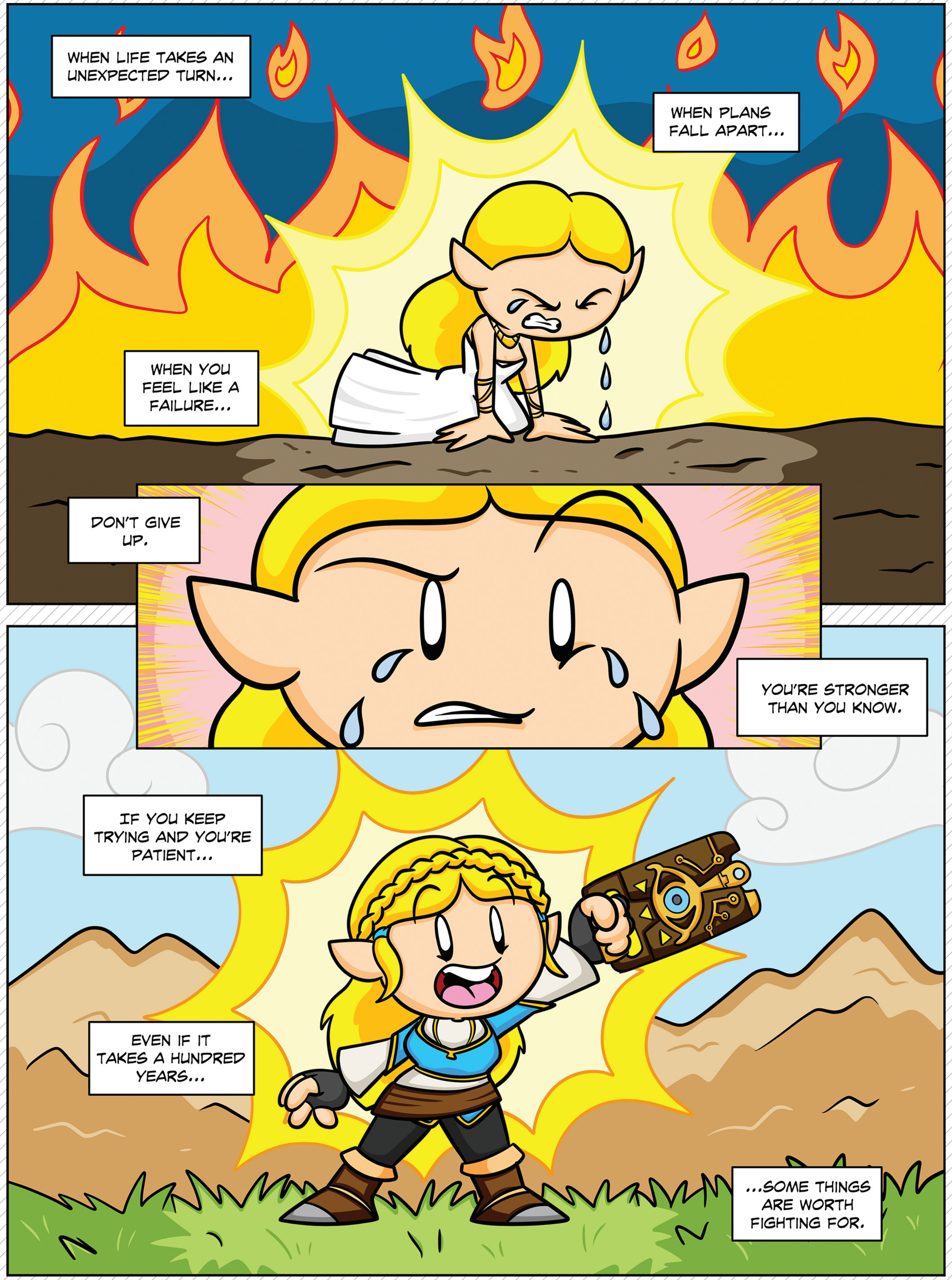
The start of each race is preceded by a surprisingly lengthy loading period. This is rather unexpected for a game meant to emulate an 8-bit handheld, until you realize that Pocket is actually assembling each track from scratch. Linky439 designed a clever course-building engine that reads text files found in the installation folder. All the track data is written in a plain English code that even programming-illiterate users can understand after a few minutes of study, thereby allowing anyone to craft custom tracks.

What we gain in customizability, though, we lose in visibility – as GBC constraints dictate, tracks do not render any objects beyond a short distance. Upcoming turns are telegraphed by flashing traffic signs of varying colors to indicate sharpness, but no such clues are provided for hazards like mines or ice. Also, instead of a proper map in the corner of the screen, only your relative position along the lap is conveyed. The result is that later tracks are nearly impossible to navigate without having the layout memorized.

But again, we must consider that F-Zero Pocket is not meant to be the next big evolution of futuristic racing. Instead, it's a possibility of what could have been had Nintendo pursued portable play prior to Maximum Velocity. Pocket manages to capture a thrilling sense of speed and tension in a minimalist fashion, plus it allows for course creation via a novel method – in that regard, it's a major success!

What does it matter anyway that Pocket clearly demonstrates why F-Zero on a pre-Advance Game Boy would have been a poor idea? Nintendo obviously isn't interested in experimenting with F-Zero these days, so why not just sit back and enjoy an afternoon of free high-octane entertainment?
– TONY

7.5



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

NEXT ISSUE

And so concludes our final issue of 2020, a year that very likely no one on the planet will be sad to see go. While the challenges facing the world right now won't disappear overnight when the calendar flips from December 31 to January 1, we can be hopeful that 2021 will bring brighter days than those we've all just lived through.

And we thankfully already know what Nintendo's got planned to kick off the New Year! The long-predicted and highly anticipated Switch re-release of **Super Mario 3D World** will finally arrive in February, accompanied by the mysterious new **Bowser's Fury** as well. We'll start to delve deeper into that next time. (If we didn't, Bowser would get mad at us!)

Lastly, another major milestone is upon us! Our next issue will be our 50th! It also just so happens that it will line up with our eighth anniversary as well. So get ready to celebrate the ongoing adventure that is Nintendo Force! Woohoo!!

NF

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #50:

SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD + BOWSER'S FURY

HYRULE WARRIORS: AGE OF CALAMITY

POKÉMON SWORD & SHIELD EXPANSION PASS, PART 2: **THE CROWN TUNDRA**

PIKMIN 3 DELUXE

SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD: THE GAME

NINJALA

SAKUNA: OF RICE AND RUIN

PUYO PUYO TETRIS 2

BRAVELY DEFAULT II

KINGDOM HEARTS: MELODY OF MEMORY

GAME & WATCH: SUPER MARIO BROS.

YS IX: MONSTRUM NOX

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: **TRAILS OF COLD STEEL IV**

MONSTER HUNTER RISE

MONSTER HUNTER STORIES 2: WINGS OF RUIN

AND MUCH **MORE!**

JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 2021

ALL TOGETHER NOW

PERHAPS THERE'S SOMETHING poetic about Nintendo closing out the year of 2020 with the release of Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity, a story about an incredibly diverse array of different races coming together to battle as one against overwhelming odds. That battle didn't go so well for this particular group of Champions, in the end – they ultimately had to hope a future generation would pick up their torch and finish their fight for freedom. But, even with victory not guaranteed, they still put their all into doing everything they could to resist the evil around them.

I'm hopeful that, in our world, we *are* the future generation who gets to look to the example set by the leaders of the past and finally build a society where all can be free and equal. Let's do all we can to fight! Let's resist evil in all of its forms, such that we don't have to settle for failure and the hope that our kids will be the ones to win.
– LUCAS

PATREON.COM
/NINTENDOFORCE

/NINTENDOFORCE

WWW.
NFMAGAZINE.COM

YouTube
/NFMAGAZINE

@NINTENDOFORCE